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A View From Within : Instructors' Perspectives of Their Roles With Adult Learners in Need of Remediation

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A VIEW FROM WITHIN: INSTRUCTORS' PERSPECTIVES OF THEIR ROLES
WITH ADULT LEARNERS IN NEED OF REMEDIATION

by

Lance J. Baxter

A dissertation submitted to the College of Education and Human Services in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES

MAY 2012

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DEDICATION

First, I would like to thank God, for all is possible through Him. I would like to thank my mother, Ms. Mary Lee Baxter, for always pushing me to realize the value of education.

In addition, I would like to thank every aunt and uncle who had a hand in raising me and getting me to the position of completing this dissertation. To all of my friends and family who offered encouragement and assistance in making this possible, I sincerely thank you all. Finally, I wish to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Elinor Scheirer, for all of her wisdom and guidance throughout this process; I am eternally grateful for all you have done for me.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study focused on the perceptions of 12 faculty members teaching courses in adult basic education and described their professional experiences and interactions with adult learners within the context of a two-year, public, postsecondary institution. Participants, ranging in teaching experience from 13 years to 43 years, volunteered to take part in one-to-one, semi-structured interview sessions to offer insight into their professional experiences. The interview sessions yielded the complex, context-specific data for detailed analysis. Data analysis, supported through educational criticism and relevant concepts from the professional literature (Eisner, 1998), was used to develop four themes: how the faculty viewed themselves professionally, how faculty viewed their students, instructional strategies used to promote student learning, and perceived challenges to student learning. Faculty perceived themselves as caring, humanistic managers; moreover, faculty viewed their students, while limited in certain fundamental academic skills, as being capable learners equipped with ancillary skills that could be used to complement their classroom learning. Furthermore, faculty reported that they used active, student-centered instructional approaches relevant to students' experiences to promote learner persistence in the face of challenging circumstances. This study included recommendations for leaders in higher education to provide high-quality professional development opportunities for faculty and adequate counseling, mentoring, and tutoring services for the students the faculty serve.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Education is a topic of discussion that has long been a popular point of contention in society. Issues ranging from how students should be taught, to what subjects should be taught, to who is qualified to teach have long been debated. A multitude of questions elicit a seemingly infinite array of conjecture from individuals both within and outside of the educational arena. All of this attention, whether positive or negative, is successful in keeping the American K-12 education system at the forefront of public concern. However, in spite of all of the public attention focused on the K-12 context, one would be remiss to ignore the existence and importance of the educational development of adult learners—specifically those in need of academic skills remediation.

Teachers serve as the single greatest factor in augmenting student achievement (Knapp, 2003). In both K-12 and adult learning environments, it is critical to explore the role of instructors and subsequent instruction as they are keys to promoting student achievement. However, research efforts into educational practice have been focused mainly on the K-12 level (Carey, 2004; Haycock, 1998; Sanders & Rivers, 1996). Meeting the educational needs of adult learners is consistent with the goals of public education within a democracy. Research into the professional practices and experiences of instructional providers in adult remediation settings is also necessary for the promotion of quality remediation services to adult learners.

Even though the education profession appears resolute in improving teaching and learning within the K-12 environment, not all students enrolled in traditional K-12 schools matriculate and complete standard high-school diploma requirements. Competent, appropriate, and high-quality instruction is needed to provide these individuals with the means to pursue substantive employment, postsecondary education, or workforce development training. Results from research on the relationships between teaching practices and student achievement in K-12 settings may provide guidance for adult educators; however, adult learners have unique needs and present unique challenges (Knowles, 1980). Therefore, research into positive learning environments conducive to learning and academic achievement for adults becomes paramount. It would also stand to reason that research into the instructors and the instruction provided by these programs should be of great importance.

With commencement ceremonies held every spring across the country to commemorate the achievements of high-school graduates, it is easy to forget about those students who are unable to participate in these ceremonies. Their participation is not impaired by some physical infirmity or scheduling conflict, however. Students who are unable to attain a high-school diploma are severely limited in their pursuit of potential employment and postsecondary educational opportunities. The efforts of those who succeed in completing their high-school graduation requirements are celebrated, but little attention is paid to those who do not succeed. For many possible reasons, these learners have failed to meet traditional high-school graduation requirements. Adult learning programs exist to meet the academic and social needs of this special population of learners. Many adults turn to these programs in hopes of acquiring the necessary skills

for advancement in their careers or admission into postsecondary education programs. Programs that provide academic remediation afford learners who did not meet with success in the traditional K-12 context another opportunity to achieve that academic success.

Statement of the Problem

Ideally, the concepts of quality teaching and learning would be the foundations of the classroom experience. However, with public focus squarely on K-12 schools, the general public has developed a proclivity to overlook the complexity of the relationship between teaching and learning in the adult context. With so little attention given to the adult learning environment, and with the multitude of voices and opinions regarding the K-12 context dominating the public discourse, the needs of adult learners and the views of their instructors have been overlooked. These instructors are charged with the responsibility of providing quality, developmentally appropriate learning environments conducive to academic success for a population of learners who have been unsuccessful in traditional settings. Their experiences with adult learners can provide insight into the complexities of meeting the needs of this population. Their previously unheard voices can yield greater understanding of their roles in facilitating academic success with their students.

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to seek knowledge and gain understanding of the perspectives of adult basic educators concerning their roles in fostering academic success for adult learners in need of remediation. Specifically, my research question is as follows: How do instructors providing remediation to adult learners perceive their roles in fostering student success?

Theoretical Framework

Research into either the quantitative or qualitative paradigm is strengthened through the development of a solid theoretical framework. The framework for the present qualitative study helped to guide my thinking and understanding of adult learning and the relationships that exist between teachers and students. It was that understanding that influenced further augmented my connoisseurship as a tool in this research process (Eisner, 1998).

The foundation for this research study included the following theories: sociocultural learning theory, the constructivist theory of knowledge acquisition, and andragogy—more commonly referred to as adult learning theory. These theories provided the initial theoretical framework for the present study. As the processes for data analysis began to unfold, participant responses prompted additional support from the professional literature regarding the notion of caring in education as well as the construct of teacher efficacy. Together, the five bodies of literature provided the framework and context for the present research study.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

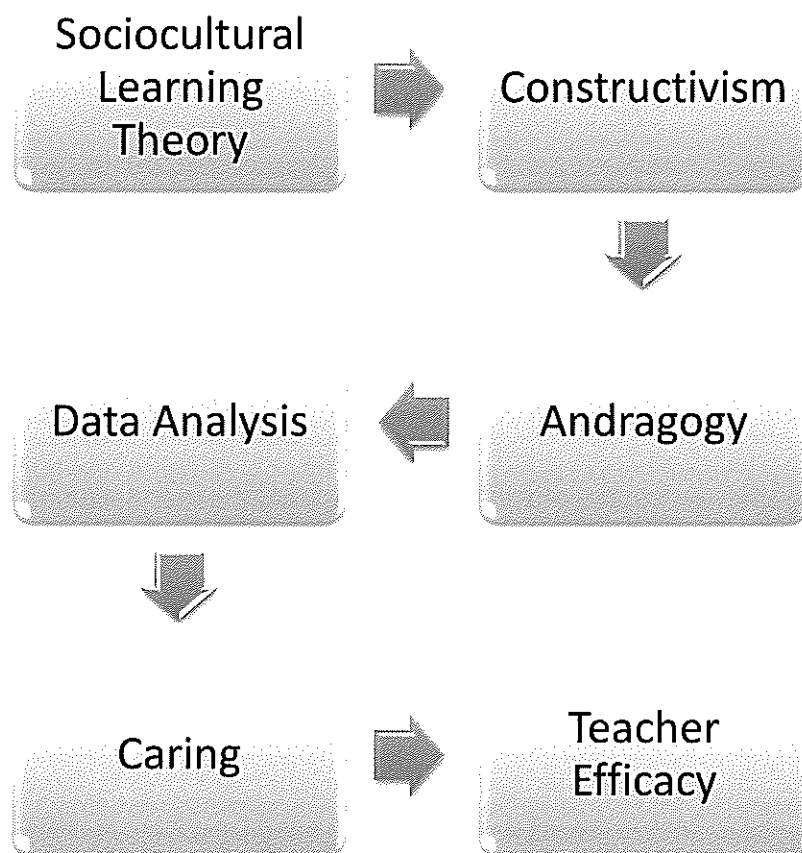


Figure 1. The evolution of the five bodies of knowledge drawn upon to construct the theoretical framework of the present study. The concepts of caring and teacher efficacy came about as a result of participant responses reviewed during the processes involved in data analysis.

Adult learners are practical and relevancy-oriented social beings (Lawler, 1991). As a result, one of the key principles guiding this research effort was Vygotsky's (1962/1986) sociocultural theory of learning. This theory took a cognitive view of learning that stressed student participation in learning communities (Vygotsky, 1962/1986). Instructors serve as facilitators in learning communities where students work together in pursuit of common goals. Additionally, sociocultural learning theory emphasizes the concept of cognitive apprenticeship. Through this cognitive apprenticeship, learners learn through the practice of doing (Vygotsky, 1962/1986).

Similar to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning would be constructivist learning theory. With its tenets being traced to Piaget (1950), the constructivist theory of learning is also student-centered; it views the instructor as a facilitator rather than the source for the transmission of knowledge. Moreover, one of the more pressing responsibilities for the instructor is to place students in positions to create their own learning experiences and subsequent understanding (Eggen & Kauchak, 2006). Constructivist methods are predicated upon the premise that cognition, or learning, occurs as a result of mental construction, during which students piece together new information with previous knowledge (Eggen & Kauchak, 2006). To aid in this process, instructors emphasize the implementation of cooperative and peer-assisted learning experiences within classroom activities, as opposed to methods which relegate students to passive and fragmented exercises.

The next component of the theoretical framework guiding this study is based upon the contributions to adult learning theory, or andragogy (Knowles, 1980). Adults and children learn differently, and as a result, studies and learning theories developed with

children in mind may not necessarily be appropriate for adult learners. Adult learners tend to be more internally motivated, goal-oriented, problem-focused, and relevancy-driven (Lawler, 1991). Although school attendance is compulsory by law for children, adults make conscious decisions to participate in learning programs. Typically, social and cultural forces recognize education as being an essential element in childhood and development. However, valuing adult education and lifelong learning is also essential for a democracy.

The notion of caring in education was not an initial focus of this research study. However, participant responses necessitated its emphasis. The notion of caring may sound either obvious, or even inconsequential, but it is a relevant, fundamental, and powerful notion at all levels within the field of education. Noddings's (1984) work with caring demonstrated to educational professionals the importance of fostering caring relationships to successful instruction and student learning; positive relationships where students feel they are cared for by their teachers essentially act as the foundation for promoting good teaching and subsequent student learning.

Similarly, the concept of teacher efficacy emerged from the responses of the study's participants. The genesis of the construct may be traced to the works of Bandura (1997). Essentially, teacher efficacy is teachers' internal beliefs that they can actually teach their students. Furthermore, teachers with higher levels of teacher efficacy tend to implement practices that engender positive student behaviors and academic success (Woolfolk, 2004).

In summary, Vygotsky's (1962/1986) sociocultural learning theory, Piaget (1950) and the constructivist theory of knowledge acquisition, and Knowles's (1980)

differentiation between the adult and child learner shaped the theoretical framework for this study. Furthermore, participant responses dictated exploration into the works of Noddings (1984) with the notion of caring in education and Bandura (1997) with the construct of teacher efficacy. Knowles's theory of andragogy (1980) portrays the adult learner as unique, and it is the instructor's responsibility to design activities and experiences appropriate for meeting the needs of this population of learners. So, where exactly do their instructors see themselves fitting into this process?

Research Question

Specifically, the seminal question guiding this study is as follows: How do instructors providing remediation to adult learners describe their roles in fostering student success? Research driven by this question promotes greater understanding and insight into instructional practices and philosophies faculty perceive to be effective. The research question is the impetus of any exercise into research; the question provides focus for the research. The focus of this research study sought understanding and emphasized the voice of the participants within a specific context (Howe & Eisenhart, 1990). Therefore, the complexities associated with the lived experiences of the participants necessitated a qualitative research design.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant to a number of potential stakeholders. First, adult education program administrators stand to gain invaluable insight into the instructional practices and educational philosophies of their faculties. Secondly, the results of this study could inform the education profession in terms of appropriate provisions for adult learners. When instructors improve their practices, the adult learners, in turn, stand to

benefit. This specific population of adult learners, those enrolled in remedial courses in adult basic education, has experienced a myriad of challenges and difficulties in pursuit of their educational goals. The results of this study can increase the likelihood of their success.

This study can serve as a platform for discussion among instructors to share their experiences, practices, successes, and failures in working with this population of learners. Such discussion and reflection among instructional leaders can potentially lead to a greater emphasis on developmentally appropriate instructional strategies more suited to promoting academic success for these students. A greater understanding of the instructors, their mission, their instructional philosophies and practices, and their experiences and interactions with their students is paramount to the instructional quality provided to adult learners.

Potentially, participant thoughts, observations, and reflections could impact and impel change in instructional practice, administrative support, and public perception of the adult learning environment and its instructors. The experiences of the instructors within their professional context are extremely complex; it is that complexity and the meaning behind their experiences that holds value (Moustakas, 1994). Through this study, readers can foster a greater understanding and appreciation for the work of these instructors and glean deeper, richer insight into how these individuals see the complexities involved with their work within the adult context. The understanding and appreciation for human experience and perspective are engendered through empathy; qualitative research elicits empathic participation into the experiences of the participants and affords readers access into their lives (Eisner, 1997).

Methods and Procedures

There is no actual prescribed method for conducting qualitative inquiry (Eisner, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Standardized methods of research offer very little utility; however, utility is an element critical to qualitative research (Eisner, 1998; Smith, 1987). The qualitative process is, by nature, emergent. This study's focus on accessing the practical and professional knowledge of adult basic educators necessitated investigating how they saw their professional world. Formal, fixed, and standardized methods of research, therefore, would not be appropriate to access the rich, complex, contextual, and field-focused understanding sought in the present study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Given such emphasis on the lived experiences of the participants and the understanding of social phenomena, this research effort employed a qualitative, phenomenological approach (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Patton, 2002).

The knowledge and understanding sought with this qualitative research effort needed context-specific human perspective; it became both necessary and logical to collect data through the means of interviewing. The research question demands access to the perceptions and professional knowledge of others within a specific context. Interviewing allows that access to the perspectives of others (Kvale, 1996; Patton, 2002). "We interview what is in and on someone else's mind, to gather their stories" (Patton, 2002, p. 341).

Interview participants included volunteers from the instructional pool of a large, multi-campus, community college in the southeastern region of the United States. Only instructors who taught adult basic education courses were interviewed. In order to

protect participant confidentiality, pseudonyms were used. All participants were apprised of their rights and ethical considerations initially as they reviewed and signed documents of informed consent.

Transcription of the digitally-recorded interview sessions produced the raw, qualitative data for this research study. Initially, interview transcripts were read repeatedly to gain a sense of the whole (Hatch, 2002). Concept maps (Novak, 1998) and methodological memoranda (Miles & Huberman, 1994) were constructed to help organize the data, and the process of inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002) was employed to help identify frames, domains, and tentative themes. The more detailed processes for data interpretation and analysis were primarily facilitated through the use of educational criticism (Eisner, 1998). The quality of that criticism was dependent largely upon my level of connoisseurship, developed throughout the course of my decade-long career in the field of adult education. The flexibility of a qualitative research design also allowed me to retain the possibility of using relevant concepts from the professional literature in the process of data analysis (Eisner, 1998). The professional literature offered perspective and context for the analysis. The knowledge sought dwelled within the experiences of my participants, and the methods chosen for data analysis and interpretation allowed me to interpret that knowledge and communicate it to the reader.

Limitations

First, limitations exist with virtually all research approaches. One perceived limitation of this study may be the skill or qualification of the researcher to assume such a pronounced and prominent role in the research process. Specifically, I functioned as an interviewer to collect the qualitative data. My knowledge and experience was also used

as a means for data interpretation and analysis. The data obtained for this study could vary with differing profiles of knowledge and skill possessed by different researchers. Different researchers may access different dimensions of participant knowledge and interpret them differently as well. Therefore, the information obtained may be construed as being partial; however, it is that partiality, or subjectivity, that is readily acknowledged and embraced within the qualitative paradigm (Eisner, 1998).

The interviewer must be skilled enough to engender trust and elicit open, candid participant responses. My 11 years of experience in the field of adult education was used to build rapport with the interview participants and extract greater substance from interview sessions. That connoisseurship was then openly articulated and used to inform educational criticism (Eisner, 1998). Educational criticism was used to facilitate the processes of data interpretation and analysis.

Next, the actual data set produced from the process of data collection may be a perceived limitation to the present study. Knowledge and insight are gained from participants' perspectives and perceptions. However, their perspectives, which comprised the study's data set, represented what the participants said they did; no observation of these interactions with students occurred.

Finally, my self-selected, purposive sample may be viewed as a limitation. The research participants represented a small sample size from a specific geographic region. This selection of participants may raise questions regarding generalization of data analysis and subsequent findings to other adult educators working in other settings. However, qualitative research cannot be routinely generalized in the same way as findings gathered via traditional, positivist approaches; it is not meant to predict behavior

or activity in a similar context, but it can present the possibility of such behaviors or activities taking place in a similar context (Donmoyer, 1990).

Generalization in qualitative research simply looks to transfer lessons learned from a particular context to a comparable one in order to understand it more thoroughly than would have been possible without the research study (Eisner, 1998). In qualitative research, context matters, and generalization cannot occur without context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). “Qualitative researchers reject the notion of universal, context-free generalization” (Smith, 1987, p. 175). In fact, Lincoln and Guba (1985) introduced the concept of transferability which affords the reader the opportunity to generalize, or transfer, results of the research to other contexts; it is not the objective of the qualitative researcher to generalize the research. However, the researcher’s use of rich and vivid description to present descriptive data helps to promote transferability for readers (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Definition of Terms

Several terms are used throughout the course of this study. These terms are defined to establish clarity and abate potential confusion.

ABE—an acronym used in adult education to describe the specific program known as adult basic education. ABE students seek requisite skills in the core areas of reading, mathematics, and language arts.

Adult Education—learning programs typically designed for students above the age of 16 including ABE, ASE, GED, and ESOL.

ASE—an acronym used in adult education to describe adult secondary education. ASE programs typically consist of adult high school and GED classes.

ESOL—an acronym used in adult education to describe the specific program known as English for Speakers of Other Languages. ESOL students seek requisite listening and speaking skills to support their English language acquisition.

GED—an acronym used in adult education to describe the specific program known as General Education Development. GED students seek the requisite writing, reading, science, social studies, and math skills to earn a high-school diploma.

Chapter Summary

The adult learning context is an area within the educational milieu that is often overlooked. More specifically, the adult learning programs focused on academic skill remediation are all but ignored. Students turn to these adult learning programs in pursuit of a high-school diploma or the requisite skills for study in vocational preparatory courses. As a result, it was the purpose of the present study to seek further knowledge and understanding of how instructors providing academic remediation perceived their roles in fostering success for adult learners. Semi-structured, one-to-one interview sessions with self-selected adult basic educators served as the primary vehicle for data collection in this qualitative research effort. Relevant concepts pulled from the professional literature, researcher connoisseurship, and educational criticism served as the primary methods for data analysis and interpretation.

The first chapter included an introduction to the context of the issue, along with an explicit statement of the problem and of the research question. In addition, this chapter included discussion of the purpose and significance of the study, the theoretical framework guiding the study, methods and procedures for carrying out the research

study, the limitations of the study, and definitions of potentially unfamiliar or ambiguous terms used within the present study.

Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature related to the history of adult education, offers an overview of current program operations, establishes a need for adult remediation, identifies the cognitive needs of the adult learner, and outlines theories of cognitive and psychosocial development. Chapter 3 includes a justification for how the qualitative paradigm appropriately complements the researcher's pursuit of knowledge and understanding through the present study. In addition, the chapter includes methods for both data collection and subsequent analysis. Chapter 4 includes descriptions of the processes involved in analyzing the data, and the results are presented through the emergence of four critical themes. Finally, Chapter 5 serves to summarize the entire research process, suggests implications for potential stakeholders, and offers recommendations for future research endeavors.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

With public attention focused on the K-12 schools, it would be remiss to simply overlook the existence of adult learners struggling to gain their academic footing. Providing quality educational services for these students is beneficial not only to local communities, but also to society as a whole. Empowering these students with the knowledge and skill sets necessary to obtain and maintain substantive employment is invaluable to economic growth and community development. In order for students to acquire such knowledge and skills, the quality of instruction that is offered to these students then becomes a central goal. Adult educators and administrators assume responsibility in providing appropriate means of instruction for this unique population of learners.

Thus, the purpose of this review of the related literature is to explore the relationship between teaching and learning in the adult context. Understanding adult learning as it exists today requires knowledge of its historical genesis and a glimpse into its current operations. Next, the review seeks to establish the necessity for adult remediation as well as the needs of the adult learner. Furthermore, it is beneficial to examine theories related to student motivation and cognitive development, as they help to explain why and how these students process information and make sense of their academic experiences.

The Historical Perspective

The United States has been actively involved with adult education and the promotion of literacy programs for nearly 200 years; this involvement can, perhaps, be traced to England and the birth of the settlement movement (Blank, 1998). The settlement movement arose in response to increasing levels of urban poverty in London during the Victorian era (Blank, 1998). Essentially, contributors to the settlement movement advocated improving conditions for the poor and lesser-educated members of society. To combat the deteriorating economic conditions of the day, universities settled students with local residents in these impoverished and economically depressed areas into what became known as settlement houses (Blank, 1998). Settlement houses were designed to promote education among economically oppressed adults and to counter the debilitating effects of poverty in these affected urban areas (Jeynes, 2007).

Perhaps inspired by a visit to Toynbee Hall, London's oldest settlement house, Jane Addams proved to be instrumental during the post-Civil War era in creating an archetype for adult education operations in the United States today (Jeynes, 2007). Addams, along with Ellen Gates Starr, co-founded Hull House, one of America's first settlement houses in Chicago, Illinois, in 1889 (Jeynes, 2007). It initially opened as a settlement house for new immigrants to promote education and humane, sanitary living conditions for the indigent (Jeynes, 2007). Eventually, Hull House grew to offer kindergarten classes, programs to support the arts, recreation programs, and night classes for adults seeking United States citizenship (Blank, 1998).

Another important early contribution to the history of adult education was made by Cora Wilson Stewart. Stewart played a prominent role in bringing attention to the

plight of illiterate adults in America (Jeynes, 2007). Convinced that adults could not learn to read with materials designed for children, Stewart developed a newspaper for her adult students marked by relevant content, short sentences, and word repetition (Nelms, 1997). With her creation of the Moonlight School program in Kentucky in 1911, Stewart gave birth to a model of adult literacy instruction still emulated today. Courses were taught in one-room schoolhouses at night by daytime schoolteachers volunteering their time during the evenings. The need was evident; on their first night of operation, the 50 school locations across Kentucky served more than 1,200 students. Stewart's zeal for adult literacy and immigrant education brought national attention to the Americanization of immigrants and literacy education for adults. Of her many noteworthy accomplishments, Stewart was named director of the National Illiteracy Crusade, as well as being appointed chairperson of President Hoover's Commission on Illiteracy.

At the state level, evening schools for adults, part-time education, and citizenship and naturalization classes for the foreign-born served as the standard bearers of the adult education movement (Sticht, 1998). This approach is perhaps best illustrated through the contributions of Jane Addams and Cora Wilson Stewart. In fact, state histories reflect the existence of organized adult education programs dating back as early as the 18th century (Sticht, 1998). Therefore, the concept of providing education for adults is not new, and its evolution throughout history has helped to satiate the needs of a growing society.

The advent of World War II brought about significant change yet again in the field of adult education with the inception of the General Educational Development (GED) test. The GED test, first administered in 1942, was designed as an alternative for military personnel forced to discontinue their high-school education to serve in World

War II and who were returning to civilian life (Sticht, 1998). Successful completion of the literature, language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies subtests offered graduates the opportunity for advanced occupational training or postsecondary education (Rose, 1990). The GED is widely used for learners above age 16 as an alternative to completing traditional high-school graduation requirements, and, since its inception, has helped approximately 14 million students attain high-school certification (Rose, 1990).

Economic distress and poverty faced many American households following the conclusion of World War II (Sticht, 1998). The advent of the 1960s brought about change within the White House with the election of President John F. Kennedy. With President Kennedy's election also came a renewed focus on civil rights and national concern over issues related to poverty and economic disenfranchisement. Continuing to build upon the positive strides of President Kennedy, President Johnson collaborated with Congress to launch a series of programs created to end both poverty and the existence of racial injustice. President Johnson unveiled this series of domestic spending programs, part of the mission to create The Great Society, which emphasized the improvement of urban life through education, health care, and transportation; one program in particular helped to forever change the landscape of adult education in America (Sticht, 1998).

The passage of the Economic Opportunity Act in 1964 created the first Adult Basic Education (ABE) program through state grants (Sticht, 1998). This 1964 piece of federal legislation established a state and federal partnership to focus on the most basic of educational skills for adults who had been unsuccessful in their attempts to complete high school (Rose, 1990). Funding for states that first year exceeded \$18 million dollars. In 1965, nearly 40,000 students enrolled in ABE programs nationwide; in 1966, the program

expanded beyond basic education and moved to the U.S. Department of Education with the passage of the Adult Education Act (Sticht, 1998). Similar to the impetus behind settlement houses, the Adult Education Act was initially created to abate the pervasiveness of poverty through educational programs. By 1992, federal funds had increased to over \$235 million; by 1996, total adult education programs served over 4 million students (Sticht, 1998).

This background highlighting the evolution of various programs and rationales for adult basic education describes how these programs have historically adapted to meet not only the needs of the learners, but also the greater needs of society as a whole. History has shown that society can be responsive to the needs of the undereducated and economically disenfranchised. Early settlement houses such as Hull House responded to the issues of urban poverty and squalor, while also providing naturalization classes for immigrants seeking United States citizenship. Similarly, Cora Wilson Stewart contributed the concept of the Moonlight Schools, addressing the societal needs of immigrant education and adult literacy through a systematic approach across several different locations in Kentucky. Moreover, Stewart's belief in differentiating instructional materials between children and adults addressed the specific learning needs of the adult and perhaps served as a precursor for later theories of adult learning. Subsequent federal legislation recognized the need for these educational services and provided support for specific programs that exist today.

Adult Education Operations

Adult basic and secondary education programs are predominantly run by local school districts or community colleges. Adult education programs in the United States

are currently governed by the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), Title II of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (Tamassia, Lennon, Yamamoto, & Kirsch, 2007). This legislation dictates the distribution of federal funds and also defines the general goals of adult education programs. These goals include assisting adults in the attainment of knowledge requisite for employment and self-sufficiency, assisting parents in garnering the educational skills needed for involvement in the educational development of their children, and assisting adults in completing secondary education requirements (Tamassia et al., 2007).

Some variation in program offerings does exist, but adult education services generally include ABE, GED, ESOL, adult high school, and community interest courses (Tamassia et al., 2007). Public-school teachers, community-college faculty and staff, or other professionals within the community typically provide instruction for students; however, they are not required to have any specific training to work with this population of students. Specifically, the ABE, GED, and adult high-school courses are designed to provide the student with the requisite skills necessary for successful completion of state high-school graduation requirements. The ABE courses, in particular, serve as a bridge between basic literacy and mathematic skills and skills on the secondary level requisite for graduation (Gajdusek & Gillote, 1995).

The need for adult basic and secondary education programs in this country is quantifiably evident. According to Sable and Gaviola (2007, p. 2), over 500,000 American public-school students in grades 9-12 dropped out in the 2004-2005 school year. In 2000, more than 34 million adults over the age of 18 reportedly had not earned a high-school diploma or equivalent (General Educational Development Testing Service

[GEDTS], 2004, p. 9). In addition, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) estimated that between 347,000 and 544,000 10th, 11th, and 12th-grade students had dropped out of high schools each year for the preceding decade without completing their high-school graduation requirements (Kaufman, Kwon, Klein, & Chapman, 2000, p. 7). The successful completion of those graduation requirements affords students the opportunities for higher education, career training, and internal growth and satisfaction. For those who fail to meet those requirements, adult education programs serve as a bridge for those postsecondary opportunities and satisfaction.

For many individuals, a college education represents an opportunity for both academic and social growth. However, individuals lacking the fundamental and rudimentary skills for postsecondary studies often face limitations in their attempts to achieve that growth. Hence, these students require quality remediation services on the postsecondary level to assist them with deficiencies in the core academic skill areas. Remedial postsecondary education consists of courses in reading, writing, and mathematics to aid in the preparation for and subsequent completion of college-level work (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2004). These subject areas, coincidentally, are also offered on the adult basic education level.

Postsecondary remediation has received much attention as of late. Advancements in technology and requirements of the job market necessitate postsecondary remediation because such remediation provides access and opportunity for college success to a broader population of learners (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). This newfound attention comes in addition to the fact that formal remedial postsecondary education has been in existence for well over 150 years (Boylan & White, 1994). In fact, it was the University

of Wisconsin that unveiled the first official postsecondary remediation program back in 1849. By 1889, the overwhelming majority of postsecondary schools had initiated some form of remediation program for their students. And, as total student enrollments of colleges and universities have continued to increase over the years, so too have the number of students needing remediation on the postsecondary level (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000).

As a result of the GI Bill in 1944, veterans returning from World War II were encouraged to participate in postsecondary education (Rose, 1990). The return of veterans from World War II, aided by inducements provided by the GI Bill, greatly increased the number of students in postsecondary education needing remediation services (McCusker, 1999; Rose, 1990). Students used the GED test as a means to access postsecondary education (Rose, 1990). However, many of these potential students lacked the fundamental skills necessary to succeed (McCusker, 1999).

For high-school graduates with weak academic backgrounds, the investment of time and money into remedial courses is essential if they are to have any hope of succeeding in college (Boylan, 1999). Deficiencies in reading skills greatly minimize the chances for students to complete a degree program (Adelman, 1996). Success for these students in the area of reading can be directly attributed to the success of passing a remedial reading course (Cox, Friesner, & Khayum, 2003). Despite conjecture to the contrary, students needing remediation services on the postsecondary level constitute a significant portion of the college population—especially those students in the public two-year and community colleges. According to a 2004 NCES study, 28% of all freshmen who began postsecondary studies in the fall of 2000 registered for remedial level work;

furthermore, over 42% of those enrolled in public two-year postsecondary institutions were subject to remediation (NCES, 2004, p. 84). Moreover, trends in modern society suggest this population of learners may continue to increase over time (Boylan, 1999).

Many community-college students are inadequately prepared socially and academically for learning on the postsecondary level (Chaves, 2006). Consequently, this lack of preparation is the cause for many of these students to eventually discontinue their coursework (Chaves, 2006). Surely, a student receiving a state certified high-school diploma must possess the requisite skills necessary to ensure success on the postsecondary level. However, this notion is a fallacy in many cases. Students' educational needs are simply not being met on the middle and high-school levels (McCusker, 1999). The need for academic remediation continues to increase among recent high-school graduates (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). These students simply lack the skills and abilities they should have acquired at the high-school level and, therefore, are in need of quality remediation services at the postsecondary level (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000).

How can students be sufficiently prepared for postsecondary education? Perhaps an argument can be made for a greater emphasis on college-preparatory coursework at the high-school level. In 1998, the Maryland Higher Education Commission conducted a follow-up study of the postsecondary academic careers of Maryland high-school graduates and found that high-school students who successfully completed college-preparatory coursework in high school earned higher grade-point averages during their first year in college than other students who did not complete such coursework in high

school. Exposure to college-preparatory coursework in high school was clearly beneficial for these high-school students.

Postsecondary remediation programs can also offer students opportunities to prepare for college-credit coursework. McCusker (1999) identified 16 strategies to improve the effectiveness of remedial programs on this level. A few of the more noteworthy include minimizing class size, hiring instructors who actually specialize in remediation, and initiating flexible assessment and completion strategies. Remedial programs, whenever possible, should attempt to draw connections between students' prior knowledge and course content (Fischer, 2003). The diversity reflected in students' backgrounds and life experiences should be reflected in course curriculum and learning activities (Maloney, 2003). Similarly, experiential learning should become more prominently infused into coursework to create opportunities to connect existing knowledge with new understandings (Chaves, 2006). This emphasis on experiential learning, however, is not a novel concept, as it is consistent with the constructivist learning theory (Eggen & Kauchak, 2006).

Hennessey (1990) studied effective postsecondary remediation techniques and found that students taking remedial coursework in college benefited from interactions with counselors and tutors; these interactions may actually promote independence and help students to persist with their education. One of the implicit goals for education should be to produce independent, autonomous, and lifelong learners. Independent learners are self-regulated and understand both their strengths and their weaknesses; they are able to implement and adapt to strategies that help them in overcoming obstacles in meeting their academic goals (Maitland, 2000). Furthermore, independent learners are

able to become less reliant upon their instructors and more reliant upon themselves. Curriculum on this level should at least be partly self-directed, as this approach encourages learners to become more independent (Chaves, 2006). However, it is important to remember that students still need assistance to help them find that independence.

It is important to gain an understanding of how to better serve the needs of this population and to establish the environment where these services are best provided. Community colleges are the most logical locations for remedial programs because of their open-door policies and expressed missions to serve all students (Adleman, 1996; Oudenhoven, 2002). However, the problems of illiteracy faced by some students may be too much for community colleges to adequately handle with the limited resources at their disposal (Oudenhoven, 2002).

Community-college faculty members absorb greater responsibility in providing academic-skill remediation than faculty from four-year universities because the university's focus is typically on research (Bailey & Alfonso, 2005). Faculty and administration within universities perceive remedial courses as not being college-level and perceive that they should not be responsible for offering them (Oudenhoven, 2002). Thus, the community-college context makes preparation for and attainment of a college education more plausible to a much greater number of people.

In summation, students who persevere and meet their secondary-education requirements, either through traditional or alternative means, place themselves in the position to pursue higher education. Unfortunately, all of these students have not yet developed the skills necessary to succeed on that level. To aid in their pursuits, remedial

programs concentrating in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics have been in formal operation for well over a century. These programs, seemingly indispensable on the community-college level, are perceived by many as being pivotal to the success of their students. Though neither innovative nor revolutionary, the practices and ideas employed in such programs are consistent with the tenets of constructivism and may be applicable to a variety of educational levels and contexts. A clearer understanding of remediation on the postsecondary level provides necessary insight into the relationship between teaching and learning and how to better meet the needs of adults in remedial education.

Necessity of Adult Remediation

Without high-school diplomas, many individuals expose themselves to hardships and disadvantages. For example, Day and Newburger (2002) found that between the years of 1997 and 1999, high-school graduates earned approximately \$6,000 more annually than their counterparts without high-school diplomas. Moreover, individuals without high-school diplomas made up approximately one third of American households operating below the poverty threshold (GEDTS, 2004).

Aside from the evident economic implications, adult education on the basic and secondary levels also aids in meeting intrinsic needs. Educating adults is an investment in the notion of human capital. In fact, Tamassia et al. (2007) stated that “policy makers and others are coming to recognize that, in modern societies, human capital, or what one knows and can do, may be the most important form of capital” (p. 11). Providing quality remedial education services benefits future generations as well. Roderick (1993) found that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds whose parents had dropped out of

high school were more likely to drop out of high school themselves. Therefore, successful ABE and ASE programs provide adults with the educational services needed to impel both their economic and personal development.

Simply making these programs available to adult learners, however, is not enough. Program administrators and faculty must also look to increase student persistence and, ultimately, student academic success. Students simply cannot acquire the academic skills they lack if they are not actually engaged in the programs they signed up for. In a study into adult learner persistence, Darkenwald (1981) found that students enrolled in adult education programs perceived school attendance as having a lower priority than their other activities or responsibilities. According to the National Evaluation of Adult Education Programs (NEAEP), nearly 17,000 registered ABE students completed a median average of 31 hours of instruction over a span of 12 months (Young, Fleischman, Fitzgerald, & Morgan, 1994, p. 9). Young et al. (1994) also found the median hours were even lower for ASE students with only 26 hours, or approximately eight weeks of instruction, over that same span (p. 9). Moreover, it was found that only about 11% of adult basic and 9% of adult secondary students attended classes continuously for the entire year, while approximately one third of the students in the sample discontinued their studies altogether within the first month (Young et al., p. 19). Unfortunately, Comings, Parella, and Soricone's 1999 study into adult learner persistence found that the majority of learners enrolled in adult basic and secondary education programs were in need of many intensive hours of learning activities to support their desired learning outcomes; the low persistence rate among adult basic and secondary students places a severe limitation on the level of academic success that can be attained.

Helping these students to persist once enrolled in adult learning programs is paramount to the academic development of the students.

As a possible solution to the problem of diminished persistence, adult education programs should focus their attention on creating experiences that emphasize learner needs and interests (Covington, 2004). This emphasis increases the chances for adult learner success and also empowers students to overcome obstacles and barriers to their persistence. Similarly, Beder (1990) argued that a shift in focus for adult education programs was also in order. Programs should change their instructional practices to become more reflective of the motivations and life situations of adult learners. Such change would, consequently, lead to increased student persistence. Comings et al. (1999) also emphasized the importance of adult education programs assisting their students in understanding the environmental factors that may influence student persistence. Effective programs facilitate student efforts not only to identify their goals but also to build the self-efficacy necessary for meeting them.

To increase the likelihood of producing successful students, adult education program administrators must look to employ quality and successful teachers. Program administrators who are truly committed to student academic success should promote faculty development opportunities that both introduce and reinforce the principles and practices of adult learning theory (Soney, 2003). On the other hand, Soney (2003) warned that, although many workshops and conferences promote learner-centered approaches to teaching and learning, classroom environments often remain primarily teacher-driven in practice. Therefore, translating instructional philosophies into classroom practice remains a challenge for faculty.

Adult learning programs on the basic and secondary levels must be structured to foster positive learning environments to a population of learners of varying ages, skill levels, and previous life experiences. Program administrators within the adult learning context must understand the nature of adult learners out of necessity for program success (Soney, 2003). This claim is practical because adult basic and secondary education providers cannot hope to run successful programs without an understanding of how to help their specific population of learners achieve academic success. Catering to the skills and needs of the adult learner is critical (Beder, 1990; Covington, 2004; Soney, 2003). Additionally, adult education programs should focus program and curricular development to the ever-changing demands of the workplace as well (Soney, 2003). Attaining a high-school diploma greatly increases an individual's chances for employability and earning potential.

However, looking at only the tangible benefits of adult education is a myopic view. Education on any level is a liberating and internally transformative event, and what that liberation can provide for students is measured by more than what is offered within the confines of the workplace or by admission into college. Boesel, Aslam, and Smith (1998) found that successful completion of GED requirements was perceived not only to increase accessibility to post-secondary education but also to increase learner self-confidence and self-esteem. In fact, increased self-esteem was seen as one of the more prominent motivators for obtaining the GED diploma (Boesel et al., 1998). Likewise, Dean (1998) found that GED recipients were more likely to feel better about themselves than dropouts who did not earn that credential. Essentially, the GED appeared to serve as an impetus for self-improvement and personal gain (Boesel et al., 1998).

Personal self-esteem is not the only intangible benefit of academic success for the adult learner. Dean (1998) found that GED recipients were also more likely to push their children to persist and complete their secondary education. Further, the acquisition of literacy skills greatly increases the likelihood of participation in lifelong learning, as well as voter participation in state and national elections (Tamassia et al., 2007). “The noneconomic returns to literacy in the form of enhanced personal wellbeing and greater social cohesion have been viewed by some as being as important as economic and labor-market returns” (Tamassia et al., 2007, p. 11). The abilities to read and write proficiently, to analyze and evaluate life situations, and to make informed and rational decisions cannot be quantified, but they are as important and germane to the holistic development of an individual as the monetary and workplace incentives for education. The necessity of these adult learning programs is evident; however, the needs of the adult learners participating in such programs are varied, unique, and complex.

Cognitive Needs of Adult Learners

The learners who comprise the adult basic and secondary education population represent a heterogeneous group. They often exhibit similar deficiencies in their academic skills; they also can differ in their perceptions and understandings of new material (Drago-Severson et al., 2001). Moreover, learning deficits that may have been diagnosed in childhood or adolescence are likely present even later in life (White & Polson, 1999). Adult education programs must provide positive learning environments for many of the same students the public schools identified and placed into Exceptional Student Education (ESE) programs (Mellard & Scanlon, 2006). If these students are to progress and complete their secondary education, it is incumbent upon the instructors and

administrators to exhaust all possible means of student retention and to provide instruction that meets the varying needs of the adult learners they serve.

White and Polson's (1999) nationwide survey of ABE programs found that nearly one in every four students registered in these programs was learning disabled. Survey respondents estimated that approximately 32% of their total student populations had some sort of disability, while over 12% of those students were classified as mentally retarded (White & Polson, 1999, p. 40). ABE programs are limited in their options for research-based instructional practices for adult learners with varying cognitive disabilities, and research for identifying instructional interventions for adults with learning disabilities is insufficient (Mellard & Scanlon, 2006). Mellard and Scanlon's (2006) position is buttressed by the perspective that instructional practices for adults must be differentiated from instructional practices used with children—one of the hallmarks of adult learning theory (Knowles, 1980). However, at the same time, many of the principles of effective teaching associated with the social construction of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1962/1986) are fundamentally important to instructional efficacy on any level.

Drago-Severson et al. (2001) noted that "students who are adequately and appropriately supported and challenged academically are more likely to learn more" (p. 26). To that point, an adult learning environment needs instructors who are appropriate pedagogical matches for an array of adult learner needs. "Teachers and programs that recognize students' developmental diversity and support their growth accordingly will be especially effective" (Drago-Severson et al., 2001, p. 28). This would seemingly indicate that learner success is highly dependent upon an understanding by the instructor of the

cognitive processes and developmental stages unique to the adult learner. An understanding and an appreciation for the differences in student academic development, coupled with the knowledge of how to appropriately challenge students on those various levels of their development, is integral to finding academic success for the adult learners.

Kruidenier (2002), in fact, argued that good K-12 research into effective instructional practices could yield excellent ideas for adult instruction. Recognition of learning differences between children and adults is essential, but effective instructional practices can be successful and should be employed in both learning milieus (Kruidenier, 2002). Cromley (2000) found that instructional techniques shown to be effective with children diagnosed with learning disabilities were also effective with adults with learning disabilities. So, in spite of the fact that research dealing with instructional interventions for adults with learning disabilities may be sparse, it does not necessarily make similar research with children and adolescents irrelevant.

In sum, as an alternative to traditional high-school graduation requirements, adult learners turn to adult basic and secondary education programs to acquire the skills necessary for graduation. The ABE program provides the basic mathematics, reading, and language skills necessary for study on the secondary level for the GED or for adult high-school certification. The inherent value placed upon program completion impacts the human condition in a fashion similar to the tangible gratification found in economic and monetary rewards. The ultimate success of these adult education programs is, on many levels, directly tied to the persistence and success of the students they serve. Hence, instructional efficacy in the adult context is highly important. The academic needs of this population of learners are diverse; adult basic and secondary education

programs are uniquely equipped to work with learners of varying exceptionalities and skill levels. Research into the area of effective instructional interventions for learning-disabled adults is limited; however, existing research dealing with children and adolescents may, in fact, be applicable to the adult context.

Theories of Motivation and Cognitive Development

A discussion of student learning also involves the underlying role of student motivation in the learning process. One cognitive theory of student motivation is Heider's (1958) attribution theory. Heider (1958) maintained that individuals are intrinsically motivated to understand and explain their behaviors, successes, and failures. This motivation may explain students' desires for feedback from their instructors. Feedback, whether it is positive or negative, helps learners better understand their successes or failures with a particular learning activity.

A second source for understanding student motivation is goal theory. Research in the area of goal theory has produced two ways of thinking. Ames's (1992) theory of mastery orientation explains learners' innate desires to become as proficient in an area as their abilities will allow. Mastery orientation is also believed to augment intrinsic motivation. Nicholls's (1984) theory of task involvement focuses on individuals' interest in the task based on its own qualities. Task-involved individuals are believed to be less afraid of the possibilities of failure and are also believed to possess high levels of intrinsic motivation. On the other hand, Nicholls (1984) described ego-involved individuals as being motivated to complete a task simply to augment their own self-concepts. These individuals are also more likely to possess an internal fear of failure.

In addition to attribution theory and goal theory, another cognitive theory for motivation is self-efficacy theory. Self-efficacy theory is a cognitive theory of motivation that emerged from Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory of learning. According to Bandura (1986), individuals are intrinsically motivated by their beliefs in their own capabilities to succeed. For Bandura (1986), the capability that is most prevalent within humans is that of self-reflection; self-reflection allows individuals to make sense of their own experiences.

Lawler (1991) acknowledged the importance of self-reflection in the adult learning process. To encourage such reflection, both learners and instructors state explicit goals for the learning experience and then periodically review and reflect upon the progress made toward meeting those goals. Adult education programs must help students to build self-efficacy as a means of reaching their goals (Young et al., 1994). Self-efficacy is focused on a specific set of tasks and represents the ability to accomplish that set of tasks (Young et al., 1994). Drawing upon Bandura's (1986) notion of building self-efficacy, adult education programs should provide both mastery and vicarious experiences to their participants as a means toward building their self-efficacy (Young et al., 1994).

Self-determination theory is yet another cognitive theory of motivation that asserts that individuals have intrinsic desires for competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1985). This theory assumes that people are actively in search of psychological growth and development and are also constantly making attempts to integrate their experiences into an understanding of themselves (Kegan, 1982; Vygotsky, 1962/1986). The needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy on the part of the

individual exist in a complex relationship between an individual and the environment which surrounds him or her (Connell, 1990).

Although various forms of cognitive engagement may be useful at times, each has limitations as a learning strategy. Self-regulated learners can distinguish themselves with an ability to navigate between different forms of cognitive engagement and to call upon each when contextually appropriate (Corno & Mandinach, 1983). Self-regulation involves much more than high levels of motivation. The ability to shift between forms of cognitive engagement and to monitor one's own use of strategies has important implications for the future work of the student. Because the use of self-regulated learning seems to distinguish between high-level and low-level student ability, Corno and Mandinach (1983) emphasized the importance of using classroom instruction to model and develop self-regulatory strategies among low-ability students.

Adult basic and secondary-education programs, as well as postsecondary remediation programs, must avoid the stagnation of relying too heavily upon the mundane and repetitive nature of isolated instruction. Isolated instruction is ineffective because adult learners are practical and relevancy-oriented social beings (Lawler, 1991). Hence, one of the key principles guiding this literature review is Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning. Vygotsky's (1962/1986) student-centered theory assumes a cognitive view of learning that stresses student participation in learning communities; teachers act as facilitators in these learning communities where students work together in pursuit of common goals. Additionally, sociocultural learning theory emphasizes the concept of cognitive apprenticeship where learners learn by doing.

The constructivist approach to learning is also student-centered, as learners are placed into positions to create their own learning and understanding (Piaget, 1950). The constructivist belief is based upon the premise that cognition, or learning, is achieved as a result of mental construction, during which students piece together new information with previous knowledge (Eggen & Kauchak, 2006). Cooperative and peer learning experiences are stressed, as opposed to drill and practice or alternate types of individualized work. Although student-centered approaches such as constructivism may be beneficial to the processes of teaching and learning according to theory and related research, many adult classes remain primarily teacher-driven in practice (Soney, 2003).

Knowles's (1980) theory of andragogy was an attempt to develop a theory of learning and cognitive development unique to adults. Knowles (1980) emphasized that adults are self-directed, inherently autonomous, and ready to take responsibility for decisions related to their educational development. Similarly, Merriam and Caffarella (1999) emphasized the importance for adults of learner autonomy and encouraged instruction promoting opportunities for independent learning. Supporting autonomy involves providing opportunities for students to make choices and to feel that their decisions and ideas are respected (Connell, 1990). Mellard and Scanlon (2006), however, cautioned that adult learners who have been unsuccessful in the traditional K-12 environment may not be best served by the self-directed philosophy reflected so prominently in the tenets of adult learning theory. Learners may lack the focus, discipline, or cognitive abilities to create and sustain an independent learning situation.

Knowles's (1980) theory of andragogy emphasizes specific elements relevant to adult learners such as their need to know, their self-concepts, the role of their

experiences, their readiness and orientation to learn, and their motivation to learn. In practical terms, andragogy implies that instruction for adults needs to focus more on the process of learning and less on the content being taught (Knowles, 1980). Instructors assume the role of a facilitator or a resource person, rather than that of a lecturer and source of all knowledge and information. Andragogy recognizes four guiding principles. First, experiences, mistakes in particular, serve as an impetus for learning activities. Secondly, instruction should reflect an array of prior learner experiences. Next, adult learning should be more problem-oriented as opposed to being content-oriented. Finally, adult learners must be central figures in the planning and evaluation of their own instruction, and, thus, in constructing their own knowledge. This process recognizes that the life experiences of adult learners are integral to their academic development (Knowles, 1980; Lawler, 1991).

Knowles's (1980) theory of andragogy has served as a theory for adult learning. However, its philosophical basis is not necessarily exclusive to adult learners. Many of its tenets are elements of quality instruction consistent with both constructivism and the sociocultural theory of learning. Although adults do bring a variety of experiences to the classroom environments that differ from those of children and adolescents, embracing students' experiences and using them to either reinforce or develop new understandings are practices consistent with teaching and learning at all levels (Lawler, 1991).

Another key theorist involved in the processes of adult learning is Kegan. Kegan (1982) proffered a constructive and developmental theory for adult growth and change. He drew upon and extended notions of knowledge construction and cognitive development to the overall development of adults across the span of an individual's

lifetime. Feeling, thought, experience, and perception cannot exist independently of context. The process for construction of reality, or the ways in which people make and interpret meaning, is fundamental to human existence. Similar to Vygotsky, Kegan (1982) maintained that individuals build their own reality according to what makes sense to them. Furthermore, he maintained that individuals attempt to organize their experiences and bring order to the world through complex systems of knowledge construction. This theory assumed a gradual view of the process of meaning-making as a person transitions through different stages of life.

This discussion of theories of motivation and cognitive development highlights the difficulty in understanding the complexities of teaching and learning within the adult basic education context. Cognitive and motivational theories help to explain how individuals of all ages think and process knowledge. Knowles's (1980) adult learning theory attempts to articulate ways of knowing and learning specific to adults; many of the core elements driving the theory of andragogy are reflected in the tenets of learning theory for all learners. Adults bring an array of unique life experiences to the formal learning environment, and they may even possess unique goals for continuing their education. As a result, learner-centered and constructivist approaches to instruction for these learners should be widely practiced (Soney, 2003). Learner autonomy and independence should be promoted; however, independence cannot be misconstrued as isolation. The basic skills approach to remediation is prevalent, but it must not fall prey to teacher-driven activities done in isolation, as they stifle the opportunities for student interaction and the sharing of experiences that facilitate in the shaping of understanding.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 2 included a review of the professional literature related to adult education. The historical genesis and current operations of adult remediation programs illustrate how segments of society have taken action to combat societal maladies and provide opportunity for individuals who often go overlooked. The chapter included examination of the potential socioeconomic and psychosocial ramifications for individuals who fail to graduate from high school, and it provided a glimpse into the cognitive needs and deficiencies of adult learners needing academic skills remediation. Additionally, this chapter contained theories of motivation and cognitive development that may inform perspective for appropriate curricular development and instructional design for this particular context.

Chapter 3 includes an argument for and methods employed to successfully conduct qualitative, phenomenological research. The explicit purpose of the research was to explicate meaning and further the understanding of complexities present within the context of adult basic education. Instructors' perspectives of their experiences and professional practices were imperative; methods implemented to obtain and analyze those perspectives are introduced and discussed.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This chapter includes a description of the research design and methodology followed to answer the following question: How do adult basic educators describe their roles in fostering academic success for their students? The specific focus of the study centered on how the instructors of these students perceived their work within the context of a two-year, multi-campus postsecondary institution. Their perspectives offered insight into what instructors do to facilitate progress and success with a challenging and underserved population of learners.

The focus, direction, and inherent complexities of this research study reflected the attributes ascribed to the qualitative research paradigm. The chapter opens with a rationale for selecting a qualitative research design, as well as a justification for implementing a phenomenological perspective in carrying out the study. Furthermore, the chapter includes descriptions of the researcher's role, the research site, participants, and methods employed for data collection and analysis.

Rationale and Justification for the Research Design

Application of a qualitative, or post-positivist, research design was essential for the successful execution of this study. The flexible nature of qualitative research is designed to access complexity and find meaning within context (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). That flexibility supported exploration into the thoughts, observations, and lived experiences of instructors responsible for providing remediation services to adult learners

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Flexibility and openness also encouraged the sharing of multiple perspectives by the participants; these perspectives added a layer of complexity to the overall research (Eisner, 1997). Insight into the professional knowledge and experiences of adult basic educators was extracted from the perspectives of the study participants within their specific context. Participants were able to share their perspectives in their own words and offer readers emotional descriptions of their human, personal, and genuine experiences (Coulter & Smith, 2009). Thus, a qualitative research design was deemed to be appropriate for this research study because of its emphasis on capturing human experience and understanding personal perspective within a specific context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Patton, 2002).

The qualitative paradigm assumes that reality is constructed by the perceptions of the participants within a given context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The complexity of a given context can, in turn, influence their experience and understanding (Patton, 2002). In fact, Smith (1987) noted that qualitative researchers support the “belief that the particular physical, historical, material, and social environment in which people find themselves has a great bearing on what they think and how they act” (p. 175). The present study attempted to access the perceptions of the instructors providing remediation in the adult learning milieu. It was highly contextual because the perceptions of its participants were developed within a particular setting.

Furthermore, the qualitative research design empowers its participants and gives voice to their stance (Patton, 2002). Expressive language, wrought with thick and rich descriptions of participant experiences and perceptions, enables the sharing of participants’ experiences with others. These shared experiences may foster a sense of

empathy within the readers for the research participants (Eisner, 1998; Patton, 2002).

Empathic participation promotes authenticity within the study (Eisner, 1998).

Phenomenology

The qualitative research paradigm is holistic; thus, it calls for a broad study of social phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). A specific application of the qualitative paradigm germane to this particular study is phenomenology. Phenomenology seeks to glean a deeper understanding of the latent meanings, as perceived by research participants, underlying everyday experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). It also describes how people perceive and interpret their experiences with identified phenomena (Moustakas, 1994).

The experiences of the participants in a phenomenological study contain meaning within context, and the meaning that participants assign to those experiences has inherent value (Moustakas, 1994). In this study, participants were asked to engage in self-reflection regarding their professional experiences and how those experiences shaped their roles in facilitating the academic development of their students. Participants were asked to reflect upon their perceptions of the adult learning context and how they, as instructors, fit into that context successfully; their voice and their stance shaped the complexity, insight, and understanding sought through the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Moustakas, 1994).

The present study's focus on the narratives of the participants was influenced by phenomenology, as those narratives offered participants' perspectives of their own experiences within context (Patton, 2002). Capturing participants' perspectives in their own words facilitates in "evoking dissonance in the reader, enabling the reader to look at

educational phenomena with renewed interest and a more questioning stance” (Coulter & Smith, 2009, pp. 577-578). One of the primary responsibilities for the researcher in phenomenological research is to extract meaning from the participants’ descriptions of their experiences within a given context (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). As the researcher in this study, I accepted that responsibility.

In summary, qualitative research is rooted in the lived experiences of its participants; likewise, phenomenological studies rely directly upon the lived experiences and first-hand accounts of their participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). The knowledge and information sought exists within the descriptions, observations, and experiences of the study participants. Both qualitative and phenomenological studies look to better understand a setting; furthermore, both are disinterested in making predictions or offering solutions regarding that setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Thus, investigation into the actual experiences of the adult basic educators, as they perceived them, necessitated the implementation of a qualitative, phenomenological research design.

The Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is perceived to be an actual tool in the research process (Eisner, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The researcher is not a dispassionate third party; rather, the researcher acts as an integral piece within the overall puzzle. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) characterized the qualitative researcher as an interpretive “bricoleur” responsible for assembling a meaningful representation of a complex situation. So, in the processes of data collection and analysis, qualitative

researchers emphasize the complexities of social interaction and the meanings their participants place on these interactions (Patton, 2002).

The researcher uses what Eisner (1998) termed connoisseurship, or a level of appreciation that allows the researcher to make both subtle and complex discriminations within a situation in order to ascribe meaning within the research process. Therefore, what the researcher recognizes occurs as a result of the confluence of participant perception and the researcher's connoisseurship (Eisner, 1998). As the qualitative researcher, I acknowledge my role and its subsequent complexity in the research process (Eisner, 1998). That complexity is inherent within the role of the researcher both as a challenge and a useful tool in the pursuit of knowledge and understanding (Patton, 2002).

As the qualitative researcher, it was my goal to understand how instructors providing remediation services to adult learners saw themselves in facilitating successful student experiences. Understanding how my participants viewed this context and using thick, rich descriptions of their experiences were necessary to build empathy with readers and to allow them to experience the world as envisioned through the eyes of the participants (Eisner, 1998; Patton, 2002).

My impetus for this particular area of study perhaps could be linked to my own professional work; I have been an instructor in an adult education program serving the needs of adult learners in need of remediation. I have taught students in search of hope, opportunity, and personal satisfaction. I have also become familiar with individuals responsible for supporting those students as they worked to achieve their goals. I have developed a level of connoisseurship regarding these students and the inherent challenges involved with teaching them which was beneficial to the research process (Eisner, 1998).

My familiarity with world of adult basic education enabled me to put the participants at ease and to facilitate their sharing of experiences with fewer inhibitions; I was an insider. Furthermore, as an African American, I was perhaps in a position to be more empathetic to the needs and challenges faced by the students of color these instructors so often served.

The ultimate goal of qualitative research is to gain knowledge and understanding. In support of that goal, Eisner (1998) pointed out that an element of persuasion exists when the researcher openly articulates the processes involved in the research. The coherence of arguments and the logic of researcher interpretations combine to support processes for data analysis; moreover, they contribute to making research useful for practitioner consumption. In fact, Eisner (1998) noted that the credibility and believability of qualitative research is augmented by its “coherence, insight, and instrumental utility” (p. 39). One of my goals as a qualitative researcher was to create a product that was both credible and also useful to practitioners within the field. My professional work with students and colleagues in adult basic education motivated me to pursue knowledge that could potentially improve professional practice.

Participants and Site Location

The participants for this research effort were adult basic education instructors, either full-time or part-time, within a public two-year institution in the southeastern United States. Like other institutions of its kind in the state, the student population, reflective of its surrounding communities, is diverse culturally, ethnically, and socioeconomically. The community college primarily services two counties with urban, rural, and suburban communities. In addition to its six campus locations, the institution

also provides classes in several outreach locations such as abuse shelters and chemical dependency rehabilitation centers to better serve those within the community. According to statistics from the United States Census Bureau, the communities surrounding the institution are comprised of nearly 75% Caucasians, nearly 11% African-Americans, and over 11% Hispanics; furthermore, nearly 14% of the residents live below the poverty level (United States Census Bureau, 2012).

Before any recruitment of study participants occurred, the overall design of the study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of North Florida in Jacksonville, Florida (see Appendix A for IRB approval). Given the focus of the research question, only those instructors who had taught adult basic education courses were eligible to participate. All faculty who were teaching ABE courses for the college were invited to participate in the study. Although the participants were faculty of my institution of employment, I excluded instructors employed at my campus location, and none of the volunteers reported to me in any sort of professional capacity. I wanted participants to feel uninhibited and free to express themselves without the perception of influence.

As a faculty member of the college, I had access to department chairs as a source for generating a list of names and email addresses of instructors who taught ABE courses. From that point, the electronic invitation was reviewed by those department chairs and subsequently sent as correspondence to potential participants (see Appendix B for participation invitation). I received responses from 12 individuals interested in volunteering their time and expertise to the study. Each participant had a wealth of experience to draw upon as their careers spanned from a minimum of 13 years to an

excess of 43 years; participants averaged between 20 and 30 years of teaching experience in a variety of educational settings working with both children and adults. Of the 12 volunteers, 7 were female and 5 were male. In addition, 10 participants were African American; the other two participants were White.

Participants were apprised of and signed informed consent documents outlining research procedures, potential risks, benefits, participant rights, and safeguards taken to protect their confidentiality and secure the data collected (see Appendix C for Informed Consent document). Pseudonyms were assigned to each of the study participants to safeguard their confidentiality while maintaining the human and personal element of the study. The pseudonyms used were actually surnames of individuals within the popular culture whom participants admired. Assuring the participants that their identities would be confidential was a necessary measure employed to allow the participants to be uninhibited and to speak openly; the richness and honesty of the participants' descriptions of their experiences were the foundation for a meaningful data set. These procedures represented efforts to exercise any and all methods available to protect the participants.

Methods for Data Collection and Analysis

According to Patton (2002), there are three types of qualitative data; they include observational data, document data, and interview data. The knowledge and understanding sought from this study was predicated upon the collection and analysis of compelling, descriptive interview data. If participant perspectives are, indeed, meaningful, the interview allows the researcher to gain access to these meaningful perspectives (Kvale, 1996; Patton, 2002).

The interview is a carefully planned questioning and listening experience designed to obtain participant knowledge and perspective (Kvale, 1996). It also serves as the simplest, yet perhaps most effective, way to obtain information from people (Patton, 2002). The interview allows for flexibility in pursuing knowledge offered by research participants; moreover, it affords the researcher an opportunity to make sense of and extract meaning from participants' experiences (Kvale, 1996; Patton, 2002). Interviews elicit descriptions and details of the participants' lived experiences, and their ambiguity is viewed positively as inconsistencies and contradictions reflect the context of the participants (Kvale, 1996). Interviews also allow the researcher access to a plethora of data in a relatively short amount of time (Patton, 2002). Essentially, interviews are used as efficient vehicles to obtain descriptive data through the words of the participants themselves (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Kvale (1996) compared the exercise of conversation to research; the research interview, in fact, is viewed as a specific form of conversation. This interpersonal exercise is "a conversation between two partners about a theme of mutual interest" (p. 125). The purpose of these conversations was to allow the participants the opportunity to reflect upon and describe their observations and experiences with adult learners. "Through conversations, we get to know other people, get to learn about their experiences, feelings, and hopes and the world they live in" (p. 5). Knowledge and insight were the anticipated results of these conversations.

A phenomenological approach to qualitative research demands the use of open-ended interview questions. Responses to open-ended interview questions yield insightful and detailed data sets that allow for a deeper understanding of the context through the

eyes of its participants (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, open-ended questions proffered during face-to-face interview sessions are free from the limitations associated with the open-ended questions of a written survey (Patton, 2002). For example, it is difficult to incorporate probing, or extended responses, within the written survey. Limitations in respondent writing skills may also hamper the efficacy of a written survey; however, the face-to-face interview session allows participants the freedom to express their feelings and experiences without limitation. Thus, employing open-ended interview questions provided greater opportunity to seek depth regarding issues of complex reality through extended inquiry via probing questions.

Specifically, one-to-one, semi-structured interview sessions were employed to access meaning underlying the lived experiences of the research participants (Kvale, 1996; Patton, 2002). It was the semi-structured, life-world interview that served as both the professional conversation and the primary mode of data collection for this study. Kvale (1996) defined the semi-structured interview as “an interview whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena” (p. 6). The openness of the semi-structured interview afforded me the flexibility and utility to alter the questioning sequence and the forms of the actual questions; it also enabled me to clarify and to probe for deeper participant responses in order to access the depth and complexity sought through qualitative, phenomenological research (Kvale, 1996; Patton, 2002).

My position and connoisseurship in the field of adult education introduced the possibility for bias in constructing the interview guide. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit thoughtful and natural participant responses and

to reduce readers' perceptions of bias (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). My role as the qualitative researcher and experienced connoisseur of adult learning was pivotal and pronounced in constructing questions for the interview guide (see Appendix D for complete interview guide). In fact, Denzin and Lincoln (2003) metaphorically equated the researcher and the research instrument as being one in the same. It was my connoisseurship and professional experience with adult remediation, coupled with topics introduced in the review of related literature, that primarily influenced the construction of the interview guide. Specific questions of the interview guide were designed to access participants' feelings, knowledge, experience, or values; grand tour questions were designed and intended to elicit reflection and detailed descriptions from participants (Patton, 2002; Spradley, 1979). Researcher connoisseurship influenced construction of the interview guide that allowed my participants to depict their own perceptions of their experiences. My past professional experiences could have led to preconceptions that would have potentially guided the research effort astray. However, the open-ended questions of the interview guide were constructed in such a fashion as to abate the possibility of bias from leading or loaded questioning (Patton, 2002).

The actual one-to-one interview sessions produced purposeful, productive conversations. I made myself available to the research participants for interview sessions at virtually any time for their convenience. If participants were willing to volunteer their time, it was my responsibility to make my schedule compatible with theirs. The interviews were conducted in quiet venues such as public libraries or small diners, so distractions were minimized. One session, however, was conducted in the participant's home to accommodate that participant's convenience. The length of these sessions

varied by participant from 30 minutes to an excess of 90 minutes. As I gained experience as an interviewer, my skill and technique improved in regards to listening and being able to ask follow-up questions based upon participants' responses to original questions. The interviews became more natural and felt more like professional conversations. The participants remained the focus of these sessions, and they were afforded every opportunity to express their reality as they perceived it to be without influence or direction. All initial and follow-up interview sessions were digitally recorded to accurately capture our dialogue.

The data collected for this qualitative study resulted from 12 initial semi-structured interview sessions with faculty who provided academic skills remediation to adult learners. To expand the breadth of the data pool, follow-up sessions were then conducted with six of the original participants who were willing to be interviewed further. Thus, the data set represented transcripts from 18 interview sessions with study participants. The data collected provided the foundation to develop insight into how these individuals interpreted a particular piece of their professional world (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

The rigorous process of data analysis began with the meticulous transcription of the digitally-recorded interview data to text files. Transcription of the interview data was supported by outside secretarial personnel. The language of the participants was captured and transcribed verbatim; the only additions to their words were punctuation marks used to facilitate readability. Those text files were then uploaded to a secure, password-protected server. This precaution was taken to preserve and protect the integrity of the data. During transcription, I made informal notes as a first step in familiarizing myself

with and organizing the data. Subsequent steps employed in analyzing the data were emergent; they were neither linear nor prescriptive in order to accommodate the complexities of the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Patton, 2002).

Interview transcripts were read several times to gain familiarity, or intimacy, with the data. That familiarity fueled my connoisseurship (Eisner, 1998). This process enabled me to construct memoranda and concept maps to identify key ideas and relationships among those ideas (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Novak, 1998). In addition, the process of inductive analysis allowed me to recognize frames and domains (Hatch, 2002). Resulting themes from these steps in data analysis were tentative; by introducing concepts from the professional literature and through the process of educational criticism, those themes were developed further (Eisner, 1998).

The credibility, or dependability, of the processes of qualitative data analysis equates with the notion of reliability in quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). One of the methods I used to address the issue of credibility in this qualitative research effort was member-checking (Howe & Eisenhart, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This process allowed willing participants to review interview transcripts for accuracy and to provide feedback regarding my initial drafts of concept maps; participants had the opportunity to correct any errors within the transcripts and to offer input to help clarify any points of ambiguity. Participants in this process affirmed the accuracy of interview transcriptions, and they engaged me in additional conversation that challenged my thinking and added additional depth to the data. These conversations also facilitated the construction of memoranda which later helped to organize the data. Logically, the research participants would be best qualified to assess my understanding of their stories

because they were the original storytellers and purveyors of perspective (Coulter & Smith, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Chapter Summary

The aim of this research was to gain insight and to develop understanding regarding the complexities of adult remediation from the perspectives of adult basic education instructors. The instructors were the tellers of their own stories; as a result, a qualitative, phenomenological approach was needed to achieve the stated goal. Participants' perspectives were valuable and essential to obtaining the knowledge and insight sought through this research study (Moustakas, 1994). The semi-structured, face-to-face interview served as the most appropriate means of capturing participants' perspectives and shaping experiences that could be shared with the reader (Kvale, 1996).

A series of iterative, recursive steps were used in the initial stages of data analysis to organize the data and identify frames, domains, and tentative themes for more detailed analysis (Hatch, 2002). Those themes were analyzed further and interpreted primarily through the process of educational criticism and through the use of relevant concepts from the professional literature (Eisner, 1998). The observations and experiences of these instructors, as told by the participants themselves and interpreted by a knowledgeable connoisseur in the field of adult remediation, resulted in deeper understanding of the professional mission and work of adult basic educators employed in public postsecondary educational settings.

Chapter 4 contains a more detailed description of the processes involved in data analysis and also includes a presentation of the results of the analysis for discussion through four principal themes. Instructors viewed themselves as caring, effective

classroom managers dedicated to fostering genuine relationships with their students; additionally, they viewed their students as being knowledgeable and capable of learning in spite of their pronounced academic deficiencies. Further, they emphasized the employ of relevant interactive instruction to promote learner engagement. Finally, participants identified attitudes and behaviors deleterious to student development, but they offered insight into how they went about helping their students overcome those challenges.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter includes clarification of the processes employed to facilitate analyzing the data collected for the present qualitative research study. Specifically, this phenomenological study sought understanding of how instructors providing remediation to adult learners perceived their roles in fostering student success. The data collected and subsequently analyzed represented the unique perspectives garnered from the study participants.

However, the process of data analysis would not have been possible without the existence of tangible and useful data. All individuals who volunteered to take part in the study, as a result of electronic invitation, were welcomed to participate and to share their experiences. The semi-structured, in-depth interview (Kvale, 1996; Patton, 2002) served as the best means to collect descriptive data in the participants' words. Creating an understanding of others and their experiences builds what Eisner (1998) noted as empathy in the minds of readers; that perception of empathy promotes insight, permits their appreciation of complexity, and allows them to see the study as authentic.

My professional knowledge and experiences as an adult educator were beneficial in constructing the open-ended interview questions; however, it was paramount that I afforded my participants the freedom and latitude to express their own perspectives without influence. The participants' perspectives of their own experiences in adult basic education were indeed separate from my thoughts and experiences. My own

professional knowledge, however, was not subjugated or hidden. In fact, that knowledge was used as an asset, or tool, in the research process (Eisner, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Not only did my professional knowledge contribute to the construction of the interview guide, but it was also beneficial during the interview sessions in eliciting deeper, richer descriptions of participant experiences.

Upon completion of data collection, the tedious and meticulous transcription of recorded interview sessions to text files began. After the interviews were transcribed into text, the task of reading the transcript of each interview session began; informal notes made during transcription eventually helped with organizing the data. Hatch (2002) recommended that the entire data set be read in sum to gain a sense of the whole. Therefore, the reading of the transcripts as a total group, and the reading of individual transcripts several times each, provided the foundation for data analysis through in-depth familiarity with the data.

The actual process of data analysis proved to be rigorous, recursive, and complex. Initially, this chapter explicates each step in that process. The process began amorphously, yet it slowly and organically assumed its definition in time. Howe and Eisenhart (1990), as well as Lincoln and Guba (1985), maintained that the process of data analysis should be made transparent in an effort to augment the study's credibility. Figure 2 illustrates the initial stages in the process.

THE PROCESSES OF DATA ANALYSIS

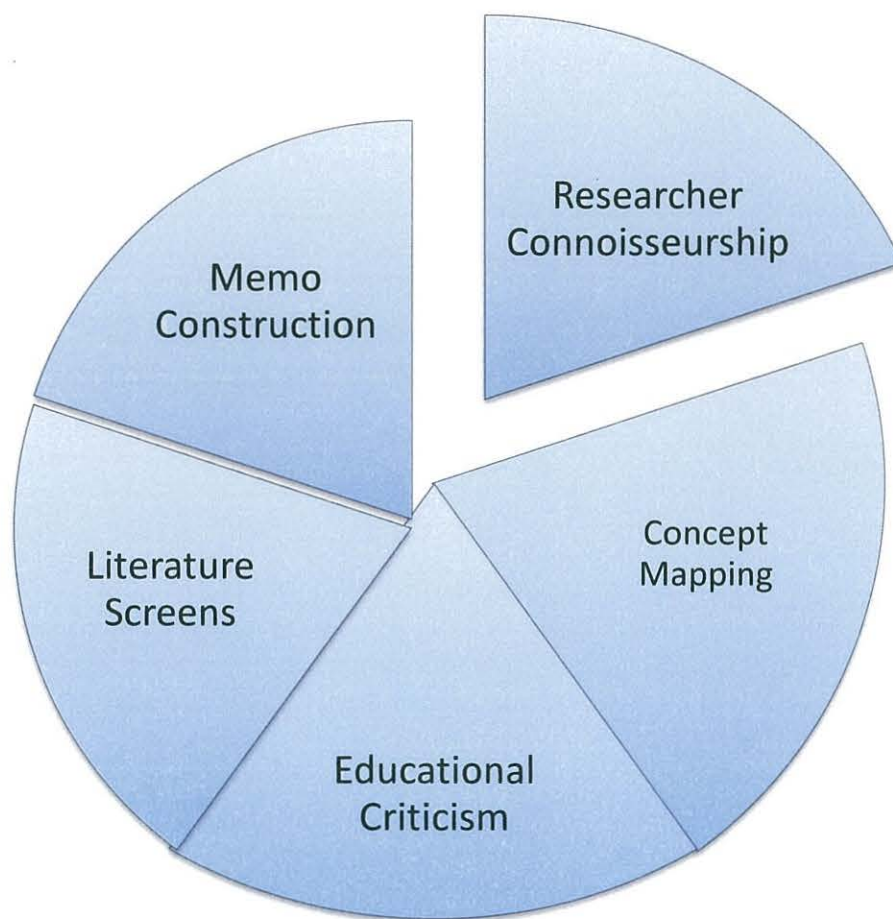


Figure 2. Five seemingly disparate stages, fueled by researcher connoisseurship, operated together as a whole to facilitate in the analyses of the qualitative data.

Initially, this process was defined by my connoisseurship (Eisner, 1998). An early stage of data analysis employed memo construction to identify threads relevant to data analysis that would be more specifically developed in later stages (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Other methods used for data analysis included concept mapping of key ideas evident in the transcripts (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Novak, 1998) and inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002). Following the initial analyses of the data, the more detailed processes of educational criticism (Eisner, 1998) and the use of relevant concepts from the literature led to the presentation of the results.

The parameters of the presentation of the results were framed within the context of four major themes: (a) how instructors view themselves as professionals, (b) how instructors view their students, (c) instructional and intervention strategies employed by the instructors, and (d) challenges that instructors perceive as detrimental to student development. Together, these components combined to contribute to a greater and deeper understanding of the data; consequently, they helped to unearth meaning within the lived experiences of the study's participants as well (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

The Role of the Researcher in Data Analysis

My professional experiences in the field of adult education contributed as a tool in the research process, but they also introduced an element of subjectivity to it as well. However, as Eisner (1998) noted, this subjectivity should not be viewed pejoratively; in fact, it should be embraced as an asset to this qualitative research design, for the understanding sought in the qualitative paradigm is influenced by individual experiences and perspectives. My 11 years of experience working in a capacity similar to that of the study's participants contributed appreciably to my level of connoisseurship—also

referred to as the “art of appreciation” (Eisner, 1998, p. 63). This art, or connoisseurship, that allowed me to navigate the subtle aspects of the adult learning milieu, has been enhanced through both the professional knowledge and experiences I have attained in the field of adult education.

Not only have I participated in a host of formal workshops and training sessions directly focused on adult education, but I have also organized and presented similar activities for practitioners and students as well. My involvement with state and nationally recognized professional organizations, as well as attendance at their annual conferences and meetings, has also been integral in building my professional and formal knowledge base.

My appreciation for the study’s participants, their contexts, and the descriptions of their experiences—my connoisseurship—enabled me to be empathic with regard to the participants’ sharing of their experiences. The participants were all aware of my long-time work with similar students in a similar context. So, if the participants saw me as an empathic figure, capable of understanding and appreciating their circumstances, the probability of their feeling more comfortable with me and sharing more openly most likely increased; more substantive and compelling data was the desired result. Furthermore, that appreciation and understanding of the professional context and participants’ experiences also facilitated the initial development of topics for data organization and subsequent analysis. Clearly, my professional knowledge and the experience garnered in this field have shaped my level of connoisseurship. In addition, this knowledge and experience served as invaluable assets to the research effort as a whole and to the process of data analysis in particular.

The Initial Processes of Data Analysis

Several procedures, introduced sequentially during data analysis, contributed to the development of categories, key ideas, and themes. However, the process proved to be anything but sequential or linear. As a new step in the process was introduced, the results from that step interacted with what had been already developed; this often dictated a return to a previous step. Therefore, the steps in the data analysis process created an interesting paradox as they proved to occur sequentially yet recursively. The first steps involved reading all of the interview transcripts and the writing of “memos” (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to capture potential topics for analysis and to serve as a starting point for organizing the data. These memos helped to focus my thinking and show relationships among ideas. The relationships and patterns among ideas within the transcripts that were developed through memo writing slowly became apparent. Miles and Huberman (1994) also maintained that these memos can potentially prove very beneficial when employing an inductive approach to analyzing data.

Under the auspices of inductive analysis, Hatch (2002) contended that the construction of theory is achieved through the careful study of a contextualized phenomenon. Furthermore, Hatch maintained that “all qualitative research is characterized by an emphasis on inductive information processing” (Hatch, 2002, p. 161). So, to aid in the search for meaning in this phenomenological study, it stood to reason that using an inductive analysis to help with organizing and analyzing the data set was both necessary and justified. Frames, domains, and tentative themes were added, refined, or deleted through rereading the data and discovering new relationships. These processes yielded themes for further analysis and discussion.

The final component in the initial process of data analysis was the construction and use of a concept map. According to Novak (1998), concept maps serve multiple purposes. First, they can be used to help frame research, reduce the data set, analyze themes, or present findings from the research. Second, concept maps can be shared with participants for revision or clarification and be used as a means of member checking; this helps to increase the perception of credibility within the study (Howe & Eisenhart, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thus, participants in this study contributed to the on-going development of the concept map. Miles and Huberman (1994) noted that using concept maps also can help to develop and to make theory more explicit. With all of this in mind, developing a concept map seemed both logical and appropriate in analyzing the data.

The task of creating a concept map took several attempts, as I continued to refer to the data and to receive input from the study's participants. As a result of all of these attempts, I was able to refine my ideas and to construct a graphic representation of the patterns and relationships that emerged. The process involved in developing the concept map led to the refinement and subsequent clarification of the themes generated during the inductive analysis.

In summary, although there can be no prescriptive or fixed method for analyzing qualitative data, it remained imperative to articulate each step that ultimately operated in this iterative process in explicit detail (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Eisner, 1998). Transparency in the data analysis process equates to a perception of credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Howe & Eisenhart, 1990). Readers must perceive the study as being credible to truly appreciate the perceptions and experiences of the study's participants. As a result, the steps involved in this inherently complex process have been proffered in

detail. The data analysis process began with the overt acknowledgement and use of my professional knowledge and experience. These two elements converged to serve as an impetus for my appreciation, or connoisseurship, of the adult education context (Eisner, 1998). This connoisseurship not only facilitated in the construction of the interview guide, but it also helped initially in identifying topics for data organization. Next, memos were written to continue with data organization and topic development. Miles and Huberman (1994) noted the benefit of memo writing to inductive thinking, so Hatch's (2002) idea of inductive analysis appeared to be both a logical and necessary transition. The process of inductive analysis facilitated the development of themes for further analysis and discussion. Finally, after several drafts and failed attempts, a concept map was successfully developed as a visual representation of the emergent themes and their relationships. The process of developing a functional concept map allowed for member checking, which again, served to strengthen the perception of credibility within the study; study participants were extended an opportunity to review my progress and offer feedback. In addition, the concept map helped to refine and, ultimately, to delineate the themes for analysis and discussion.

The Role of Educational Criticism in Data Analysis

More detailed and specific strategies were then exercised to facilitate and drive the presentation of the study's findings. The first of those strategies was educational criticism. To achieve deeper understanding, the subtleties of the phenomenon being studied are openly and publicly articulated through the established connoisseurship of the researcher (Eisner, 1998). In other words, the connoisseurship of the researcher is given a voice. The appropriate and effective use of educational criticism in the process of data

analysis allows others to pick up on certain details in the analysis they ordinarily would not have noticed. Through the employ of educational criticism, the researcher, or connoisseur, is afforded the opportunity to elucidate the hidden complexities of a phenomenon, thereby fostering that deeper understanding which is expressly sought. Specifically, the data set was subject to each step in the four-part process of educational criticism inclusive of description, interpretation, evaluation, and thematics. Collectively, these steps helped to bring meaning and cohesion to the seemingly disparate pieces of data; furthermore, they helped to foster a more intelligible understanding of an unfamiliar phenomenon and its context (Eisner, 1998).

Each phase in the process of educational criticism is designed to promote meaning and clarity within an otherwise confounding or ambiguous phenomenon. In this study, they helped to impel further analysis into the major themes identified through the initial stages of data analysis. The descriptive phase depicted participant experiences through the use of thick and rich descriptions. Next, interpretation was needed to provide a framework, or context, for the descriptions shared by the participants. Thirdly, the data were evaluated, or appraised. That is, interpretations were developed and used to show the meaning of the experiences shared in terms of participants' views and in terms of professional knowledge; evaluating those interpretations of the described experiences was essential for an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of the data in terms of the value of the experiences for students' education. The fourth and final phase in the process of educational criticism was thematics. Thematics allows the researcher to determine what was learned and perhaps what potential value the results may present for others (Eisner, 1998).

It is important, however, for a researcher to acknowledge and respect the boundaries associated with the effective use of educational criticism. The process is clearly fueled by researcher connoisseurship, but it must not be utilized by the researcher to espouse personal judgments or interpretations of the data (Eisner, 1998). In fact, the function of educational criticism in the process of data analysis is to help interpret and bring meaning to the data provided by the study's participants. Good criticism should reflect the researcher's interpretations of participants' perspectives; however, it should not reflect attitudes or ideals born of personal experience or perspective. Therefore, I willingly accepted the role as a conduit for the study's participants to share their experiences, and I refrained from the interjection of personal perspective or belief—which, ultimately, is the goal of good educational criticism within the qualitative paradigm.

The Role of the Professional Literature in Data Analysis

The second strategy employed to help present findings from the study involved the use of relevant concepts present within the professional literature. An initial review of the professional literature was presented in Chapter 2 in an effort to establish a focus for the study and to help guide the research. Another foray into the literature was then needed to explore in more detail the themes generated from the initial processes of data analysis. It became imperative to incorporate new literature not previously used in Chapter 2 to avoid the temptation of specifically looking for and organizing data to reflect ideas presented in the initial literature review. However, it would have been both disingenuous and remiss on the behalf of the researcher to exclude relevant material from the previous review that could prove useful in analyzing the current data set.

The primary objective for incorporating relevant concepts from the professional literature into the analysis of the data was to develop and discuss the study's findings more fully in terms of the four major themes developed through the initial processes for data analysis. The literature related to these themes helped to bring clarity and understanding to how study participants perceived their roles in creating academic success for adult learners.

With the alignment of the study's research question, initial literature review, data collection methods, and processes for data analysis, knowledge and understanding persisted as the expected results of this basic research effort (Patton, 2002). Specifically, Eisner's (1998) strategy of educational criticism and a second review of the professional literature were both necessary and integral in developing that knowledge and understanding. In addition to their utility in analyzing the data, these strategies also served as a backdrop to present a discussion of the findings resulting from the process of data analysis.

The Analysis

The challenge of bringing together several divergent practices into a pragmatic and functional amalgam for the purpose of data analysis was daunting. However, this organic process served as the catalyst for drawing insight and meaning from the perceptions of study participants. Furthermore, it spawned four overarching themes for which to present its results.

First, an analysis of how the instructors saw themselves as professionals is presented. Participants engaged in a bit of self-reflection to express how they view themselves, their behaviors, and their effectiveness within the classroom environment.

The value the participants placed on their professional image and function is evident within the analysis. Secondly, the data analysis process rendered a theme dealing with how the study participants view their students. The analysis illustrated how study participants perceive the individuals they are responsible for educating. After establishing how the instructors perceive themselves and their students, the next topic for discussion shifted to instructional and intervention strategies used by the participants designed to help their students succeed. The techniques employed by the participants which they perceive as being effective in working with their students are depicted through the analysis. The final point for discussion involves the perceived challenges to student learning. The analysis detailed a series of challenges that study participants perceive as deleterious to the learning process for their students; however, it also conveyed a sense of optimism with accounts of students who overcame such challenges to find success. Figure 3 illustrates these themes and their relationship to the research question.

THEMES FOR DATA ANALYSIS

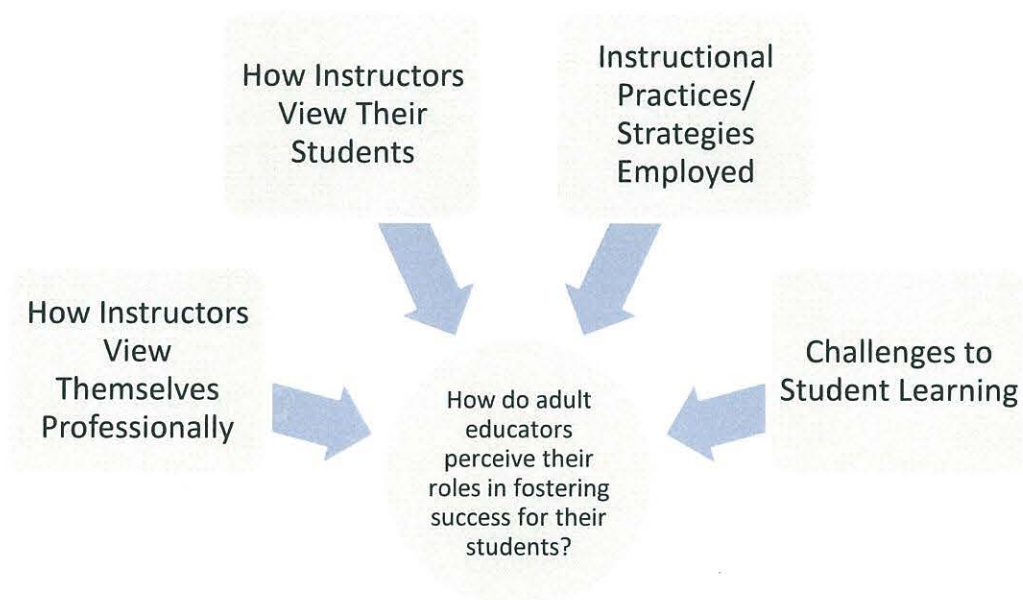


Figure 3. The four overarching themes identified during the process of data analysis and how they converge at the point of the research question.

Ultimately, the underpinning of this study is reliant upon instructor perspective to satiate a desire for knowledge and understanding. As a result, the topics for analysis and discussion are sequenced to initially show how the study's participants view themselves and those they serve. Then, the discussion transitions to what the participants actually did to help their students learn. Finally, the participants offered what they perceived to be challenges preventing that learning from actually taking place. Each theme was analyzed and presented through the phases of Eisner's (1998) strategy of educational criticism as well as through key concepts pulled from the professional literature. Together, the presentation of the study's results through the aforementioned themes contributed to fostering insight and understanding into participants' perspectives of the complexities within the adult learning context .

How Instructors View Themselves Professionally

To help explicate knowledge and understanding of the professional capacity and practices of the research participants, data were analyzed and presented through the following theme: how instructors view themselves professionally. Participants described themselves as having high levels of teacher efficacy, being caring professionals, and assuming management responsibilities.

Teacher Efficacy

The notion of perceived self-efficacy refers to personal beliefs about one's capabilities to perform actions at designated levels (Bandura, 1997). Judgments about efficacy are "concerned not with the number of skills you have, but with what you believe you can do with what you have under a variety of circumstances" (Bandura, 1997, p. 37). More specifically, the professional literature recognizes the concept of

teacher efficacy. And it is the concept of teacher efficacy that aligns itself with the overarching theme of how this study's participants view themselves professionally.

Definitions for teacher efficacy vary slightly within the professional literature, but they essentially convey the same message. Teacher efficacy has been defined as a “teacher’s belief in his or her own capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context” (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy, & Hoy, 1998, p. 233). Interestingly, these beliefs do not need to be substantiated by external evaluations. Woolfolk (2004) further developed this construct to include judgments made by teachers of their abilities to influence student engagement and learning—even among those students who may struggle academically and lack motivation. For example, Mr. Jordan, a 20-year adult educator with experience on the postsecondary level as well, displayed a high level of teacher efficacy when he reflected on his own instructional capabilities.

A lot of students know I’m a good instructor. I’m better than good. I’m an extraordinary instructor, and I love it. . . . I’m knowledgeable, and I have my ducks in order. I know my subject matter. I love my students, and they respond to that. They respond to it. It’s like that on this campus. I’ve had the largest courses ever offered in terms of students. We have to keep expanding them. . . . My credentials are my students.

Mr. Jordan’s high sense of teacher efficacy is due, at least in part, to the large numbers of students who register for his classes. His course enrollments were likely influenced by “word of mouth” among students. In school settings, many students’ perceptions of teacher quality are shaped by the perceptions of their peers. Essentially, students who have positive experiences with a particular teacher are likely to tell others. Clearly, this communication positively affected his sense of teacher efficacy, and he

strives to continue to attract more students; as his class sizes continued to increase, so did his confidence in his abilities to reach and help those students.

Ms. Lee, an instructor with over 18 years in the field of adult education, described a similar perception of teacher efficacy and how it has remained high throughout the course of her career.

I hope that I've grown. I've grown in maturity and understanding, but I hope I maintained some of the idealism that I've had since I began teaching 18 years ago. . . . I would have to say, thinking about all the opportunities that I've had to teach, I still use those experiences for good or bad. I still believe in my abilities to reach all of my students—no matter what situations they are going through. I think it's a good style of teaching.

Why is this notion of teacher efficacy so important— or even relevant for that matter? Ross (1994) identified links between teachers' sense of efficacy and their professional behaviors. In his analysis of 88 studies related to teacher efficacy, Ross (1994) found teachers with high levels of efficacy more likely (a) to learn and implement new approaches to teaching, (b) to use classroom management techniques that promote student autonomy, (c) to provide special assistance for lower-achieving students, (d) to build student self-perception of academic skills, (e) to set attainable goals, and (f) to persist in spite of student failures.

Similarly, Gibson and Dembo (1984) investigated the differences in classroom management styles between high and low efficacy teachers. They argued that teachers with low efficacy were more likely to give up when students could not answer questions quickly, and those teachers often criticized their less successful students for mistakes. Likewise, Gordon (2001) maintained that teachers with lower efficacy often held lower expectations for both student learning and behavior; conversely, teachers with high efficacy spent more time on academic activities and tended to be more supportive and

encouraging with their less successful students. Moreover, Gordon (2001) found instructors with higher levels of efficacy and a more humanistic approach to instruction to be more supportive and accepting of students' academic failures. In fact, Ms. Holt, a 22-year education professional with experience in both adult education and remedial postsecondary education, described herself in a fashion consistent with this point.

I'm open with students, and I accept failure. Obviously, I don't want them to become comfortable with it, but I try to emphasize that they can learn from past mistakes. I don't chastise for any errors that they make or anything they've done wrong in their pasts, but I use those failures as teachable moments to help them in their futures.

Additionally, teacher efficacy may also be a likely contributor to the self-efficacy of students (Ross, 1994). That is, when students' sense of efficacy is high, they are more likely to participate in class activities and persist in spite of difficult or adverse situations. Furthermore, more effective instructional practices, higher levels of teacher job commitment, and even higher student academic achievement have all been positively correlated with high teacher efficacy (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993). Clearly, findings from the professional literature would suggest the notion of teacher efficacy as being all the more relevant and applicable to this study's participants and the students they serve.

Mr. Ryan, an adult educator for the past 16 years, also described an augmented sense of teacher efficacy as he spoke of easing students' apprehension in his mathematics class.

One who looks into my classroom can see that I am serious about what I'm doing. I understand that there is a process—there's a way of trying to go back to grab students' attention, to be innovative, to show them tricks that they can make stuff so easy and to make school less imposing. I make it where it can be fun, and I try to remove the fear and apprehension many students associate with math. I know many of my students are scared of math, and using that knowledge to allay their fears and make them more comfortable helps me to reach those students that

never seemed to get it in the past. I know I make a difference, and that gives me the confidence to keep working with these students.

Mr. Ryan described a level of confidence in teaching mathematics that, unfortunately, other instructors often do not have. Factors that contribute to math anxiety for many students can be traced back to perceived negative experiences from elementary school (Furner & Duffy, 2002). Mr. Ryan described a perception of high teacher efficacy in his teaching of math which, in his eyes, contributed to decreasing the anxiety felt by many of his students. However, instructors' lack of content knowledge may explain why so many students experience such anxiety. In a study into the teaching of mathematics, Bursal and Paznokas (2006) found teachers' low levels of confidence in teaching K-12 mathematics as an indicator of low teaching efficacy; this resulted in their own high levels of anxiety regarding the teaching of mathematics. If the students are to look to their instructors for guidance and leadership, the instructors must possess a belief in their own abilities to teach the content. Mr. Ryan's high sense of teacher efficacy may transfer to his students and help to ease their anxieties in confronting a very difficult content area for most individuals.

Similarly, Ms. Hall, an educator with over 30 years of experience in both elementary and adult education, expressed a high sense of teacher efficacy as she spoke of herself as an experienced instructional leader.

Well, I've been teaching for 33 years, and I would like to think that I am an effective teacher and leader as well. I am interested in my students, and I like to challenge my students. I am not one to allow them to just think that they can just slide by and get away with anything. I think that students need to have responsible attitudes about life, and they need to prepare themselves for the world. I feel like I'm the person who can help make that happen.

She seemingly expressed that same sense of high teacher efficacy, yet again,

when she talked about the different subject areas she has taught. Being able to persist and successfully teach an array of subjects would certainly boost an instructor's sense of efficacy. The confidence gained and lessons learned from years of successful experience were evident in her earnest description.

Well, I guess it's always easier to teach one subject than it is multiple subjects. But you know, I've had so many positive experiences with students, and I've learned so much throughout my career that I'm just as comfortable teaching all subjects for the GED, as I am now just teaching reading for the TABE. I've pretty much done it all, and I think I have the ability to help any of my students that walk through that door.

Mr. Banks, an adult educator for over 13 years, described the notion of teacher efficacy when he described characteristics that supported his perception of himself as a good teacher. His confidence was evident as he deftly described his abilities to reach his students. His overall belief in his students transferred into strong beliefs in his abilities to help them succeed academically as well. Those beliefs indicated a high sense of teacher efficacy.

I'll tell you why I think I'm a good teacher; because I understand that my students all come from different demographics—age, socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnicities, what have you. I want to be approachable and connect with them in regards to how they're able to capture their ability to learn and the way they learn best. One thing I understand is that all students learn differently. And I always say to them that we must find the way for their learning style, their skill level, to be achieved to the best of their abilities. So it's important that the student understands that something shouldn't be done the way I would expect them to do it or even in a way I might do it myself; it has to be done in a way that they are comfortable in doing it. . . . If I just told them it was going to be my way or no way, it wouldn't give them any room to think about alternative ways to learn. If I'm going to be a positive influence on the students that I work with, I am obligated to finding as many ways as possible to help these students to learn in the best way they can learn to the best of their ability.

In fact, Mr. Banks's descriptions are reflected similarly through findings within the professional literature. Woolfolk and Hoy (1990) found that high-efficacy teachers favored more humanistic instructional approaches designed to promote student

autonomy. Mr. Banks's accounting clearly suggests that he encouraged his students to take ownership, or autonomy, over their learning. He emphasized helping his students find a way of learning that works for them, which indicates flexibility and openness to student-centered instructional practices. A similar sentiment was expressed by Ms. Hall.

So I do try to get things that they would be comfortable with and not frustrating for them. You can lose them real early if you're going over material that's over their heads. So I try to keep them at a level where they can be independent workers and not feel overwhelmed. The less they have to rely on me, the better off they'll be as they try to move on to college.

That sense of autonomy can be empowering and instill confidence within students that previously did not exist. In essence, the confidence that the instructors have in their own professional abilities can drive instructional practices that help instill confidence within previously academically unsuccessful learners.

Caring

One commonality shared by the instructors was the notion that they genuinely care for their students. On its surface, this may appear to be a mere platitude or insipid gesture. However, the notion of caring is actually critical to participant perspective. The participants described their emotion and their passion for their profession, as well as the well-being of their students' personal and academic needs. For example, Ms. Caesar, an adult basic education instructor for the past 15 years, described her feelings for her job and for her students.

I just have a passion for teaching. I love working with people, and I care about seeing my students succeed. I love learning from others, so my experience has been great here in adult education. I love what I do, and I love learning. I love teaching, and I love helping my students. I just have a passion for seeing students being developed into great citizens doing great things.

Ms. Caesar's emotive and expressive descriptions of her passion and repeated

emphasis on love suggest an earnest and deep commitment to caring. Not only did she express that commitment to her students, but the length of career intimates a level of commitment and caring to her profession as well. She appeared to have made an emotional investment in the academic lives of her students, and she is rewarded ultimately through their development and success.

Ms. Sharpe, an educator with nearly 36 years of experience, also gave an impassioned description of just how much she cares for her job and her students. She exhibited caring through faithful dedication throughout her entire professional career—and even beyond.

Well, I would say that adult education has been my lifelong career. I have many, many years of experience in adult education. I retired, and I came back to adult education because of the love that I have for the students. One of my greatest joys is to see people change and to make a difference in a person's life.

Likewise, Ms. Gomez, an educator with nearly 17 years of experience teaching elementary, postsecondary, ESOL, and ABE students, gave an impassioned description of herself and her feelings for her students. She exhibited a caring demeanor, passion, and dedication to creating a welcoming learning environment for her students.

You know what—I would say that I am really caring. I put my heart into my students. I really do. My students understand that they can come to me with any questions; they don't have to feel embarrassed, and they know that I give them a lot of my time. So I would say that I am a caring, devoted professional. I'm enthusiastic, I love my job, and I'm always in a good mood at work. I am very active and motivated. I really think that I make it enjoyable for them to be in my classroom. It's fun—my classroom is fun, and I think they really love coming to school.

Ms. Hall expressed a similar affinity for her students and their educational pursuits. She described actions that seemingly exhibited caring on her behalf.

So, I am a teacher that gets involved with my students, and I try to do as much as I can to help them meet their goals. Even if I have to pick some of them up sometimes to bring them to school, and even if I have to take them home at night

after, you know, when I get off work. So, I just try to be there for my students because I know how important it is to have an education.

Mr. Jordan shared a similar sentiment. He has sometimes placed the needs of his students ahead of those of his own family. He described a passion for helping his students that was almost tangible, and he has dedicated his professional life to helping his students. Mr. Jordan has essentially equated the notion of caring with his professional purpose.

I will go the extra mile with a student. It is demanding. My wife doesn't appreciate it because I'll spend more time than I need to—more than I'm getting paid for. But you know, it's the individual, and they have needs. I'll try to help, or I'll find someone to help them solve their problem. If they are really struggling through a course, I will pair them with somebody and have that person take them under their wing. It's part of being an educator. It's part of my job, and that's what I do. . . . I love what I do, and that makes a difference.

Similarly, Mr. Banks described his passionate and caring affect within the adult learning context. It is one thing for an individual to say that he cares for another; however, Mr. Banks, like many of the other study participants, gave specific accounts of how to exhibit caring and how it impacts the students.

A typical day in working with my students involves my coming in and giving them a very pleasant and enthusiastic greeting. I'm a very passionate and animated instructor, so I'm always looking to see a smile. I always—I tell my students all the time I'll probably tell you how proud I am of you numerous times. I believe that taking little moments in the day for small gestures like that make all the difference in the world to the students.

Ms. Lee shared a similar perspective.

Before the class I try to connect with the students when they come in. I ask how their day was going. I ask about what they did last night or plans for the weekend. I try to discuss a current event to focus their attention and then transition into the class. I always greet the students. I always welcome the students into the class—every student, everyday. When class is over, I also ask them if they're going to come back tomorrow. I tell them to have a good day or to have a good weekend. I look forward to seeing them again.

Words can express hollow and perfunctory sentiments of caring, but actions tangibly demonstrate those sentiments. Mr. Banks and Ms. Lee offered encouragement and created a welcoming environment for their students with a simple greeting. It is a practice that does not require much time or formal training, but it shows the students that their presence is appreciated and that their instructors care about them. Ms. Lee even said she extended an invitation for her students to return at the end of her classes. This is a simple, yet prudent, move when working with students who exhibit inconsistent attendance patterns. Whether accurate or not, many students believe that their instructors do not really care about their learning or about them in general; consequently, they do not value the classroom experience or building relationships with their instructors. Offering students a greeting as they enter the classroom may not be a panacea for adult learning, but it does show adult learners that their instructors care for them. It represents a small step in creating a positive, supportive learning environment where students feel connected and cared for (Noddings, 2002). One way to increase the likelihood of learner persistence is for faculty to provide personal support for students and work to create caring, inviting classrooms (Comings et al., 1999).

Ms. Thomas, an adult educator with 43 years of experience in the field of education, contributed an interesting perspective that also communicated specific measures that indicated caring.

I think I'm patient. I'm very patient. I don't mind repeating myself several times until the person or the student gets an understanding of what I'm trying to convey. I think I'm perceptive. I can feel when there is frustration. I can anticipate what might be causing the frustration, so I may change how I'm explaining whatever it is so that I can reduce the level of frustration in the student. And learning to read the body language of my students is big. When I see that lost look in their eyes, and I say, "Okay, tell me what you didn't understand." Or I see the head going from left to right and that says they are not understanding a thing that you're

saying. So I'm able to be aware and then respond. I can realize a wrong approach and change my approach. Change your strategy—change whatever needs to be changed, so that you can get that information across to the students. I think I'm a very perceptive individual, but I'm also very eager to learn individuals. I love learning new things. I love learning about new ideas. I love learning. I just love learning. And I don't feel like anyone is ever too young or too old to learn or to grow.

Ms. Thomas conveyed several interesting points. First, she described how she exhibited patience with her students through her constant willingness to repeat and clarify information for her students. Where some may grow tired of repeating themselves, Ms. Thomas demonstrated an action that showed how important it was that her students understood her. She also discussed the subtlety of perception and intuition in the classroom. The ability to interpret body language and to pick up on signs of student frustration allows the classroom instructor the flexibility to modify instructional delivery or offer assistance to a struggling student. Students may not always explicitly articulate their frustrations or specific academic concerns. Instructors who are perceptive and capable of understanding the nonverbal communications of their students can be viewed by their students as caring. Perhaps the experiences garnered throughout the course of an instructional career that spanned over four decades helped to develop this innate and invaluable skill. Ms. Thomas also conveyed a belief that no one was too old to learn and to grow; this attitude demonstrated a passionate and caring affect for not only her profession, but for the older students she served that many others would simply disregard.

This perceived notion of caring and its subsequent importance are reflected prominently within the professional literature as well. Thayer-Bacon and Bacon (1996) argued that instructors who care about their students are often remembered by and bring about change within their students; moreover, these caring instructors are more likely to

stimulate growth and reach their students successfully. Furthermore, they insisted that the element of caring is crucial to any model of instruction that emphasizes the student as a whole person (Thayer-Bacon & Bacon, 1996). The instructor, viewed as the one who cares, is committed to the holistic growth and development of a complete human being (Noddings, 1984). It is imperative that the instructor works to create a safe environment where mutual respect is shown (Liston & Garrison, 2004). Connections and relationships between faculty and students are then more easily established.

More specifically, to care is “to try to apprehend the reality of the other” (Noddings, 1984, p. 14). For instructors to “apprehend,” or to have an intuitive understanding of the realities facing their students, they must first make a connection with the students. Developing personal relationships is essential to good teaching; teachers have to care about their students’ lives to foster a connection with them (Liston & Garrison, 2004). Instructors make conscious decisions to interact with and engage in the lives of their students to forge mutually beneficial relationships (Noddings, 2002). Natural caring and the formation of meaningful relationships are central to the process of education (Noddings, 1984). Mr. Banks contributed a fascinating rumination consistent with that notion.

I often say to my students that nothing separates myself from them except for a piece of paper. I say that because I know maybe they are not as educated as myself on paper, but I think it gives them a feeling of confidence to know that the instructor is willing to humble himself or herself in such a way that they understand that he doesn’t feel that he’s better than me even though they know that I am the instructor and I am the educator and I am the authority in the classroom. They feel good about someone speaking their speak. So I do try to, prior to the academic engagement occurring, to connect with them from a social standpoint. I am always trying to socially connect with my students because so many of them are socially disconnected.

Ms. Lee offered a similar sentiment in regards to making a connection with her students.

I think making a connection is very important. I think whether it's an adult learner in an institution like a college or an adult learner in alternative school setting. I think that it's that connection, whether it's the teacher or whether it's the institution itself. It is very important to their learning within the classroom. I'm sure statistics can show that students that have that type of connection to an individual or mentor or the institution itself—they're more successful in life. So those students that continuously hang around the school probably stay out of trouble. As if they didn't have that in comparison to those that do not have that connection.

This notion may apply even more so for students who have experienced prior academic challenges—much like the students served by this study's participants. Hope for students who struggle in school is often the product of teachers who care about their students both as learners and as people; to further the point, it is almost impossible to teach successfully without genuinely caring both for the learner and for their learning (Eggen & Kauchak, 2006). These powerful notions were not expressly proffered for consumption by actors within the adult learning context; however, it can be argued that they are applicable in any learning context—especially that of this study's participants.

Unfortunately, not all instructors possess this characteristic. That may account for why some students continue to struggle academically. Students, especially those seeking remediation, need a connection with an instructor who cares about their success.

Conversely, successful instructors are those who care about seeing their students succeed.

Mr. Jordan described his perception of ineffectual instruction that lacks the element of compassion, or caring.

I think, you know, some teachers think just having the knowledge is enough. I don't think that's true because I've known people that have all the brains in the world, and they can think circles around me, but they are absolutely terrible teachers. They have no compassion for the student. I think they forget that, as

instructors and as teachers, we're serving the students. They're not there to serve us. And I think they don't get that, and that's just my opinion.

Similarly, Ms. Lee described her perception of ineffective instruction as a result of a lack of caring as shown through understanding.

I think teachers who do not understand their students are less successful. When I say understanding, I mean the students' environment, their experiences, and what got them in their current situations. It's not to say that you have to be from a particular culture or you had to have experienced what they experienced in order to be successful. But you can't be scared of your students and where they come from.

Ms. Hall also expressed the importance of getting to know and better understand her students. Establishing this familiarity with her students better equipped her to deliver what she perceived to be effective and high-quality instruction.

I think an effective teacher needs to really know their students because, if you know your students, then you are going to know how best to teach them according to their needs. You should instruct them according to what they need. I think there should be some type of initial assessment and after you find their weaknesses, then you concentrate on those weaknesses and try to build their strengths as well.

This sentiment, however, did not always resonate with Ms. Hall and had to be developed over time. Experience gained throughout the course of her career caused her to evolve and refine both her ideals and her practices.

I have changed because, at one time, I really was not that involved in the backgrounds of the students in regards to how that will help them adjust in class. What I know now is that you really do need to know something about your students in order to understand why they come in with some of the misconceptions and personal issues that they have. Taking the time to get to know them has allowed me to become a little bit more patient with the students who are struggling more. I now realize that you are going to have some that it's going to just take them more time to get it, and everybody is not on the same level. You just can't keep moving a class forward until you know you reached everybody, so I've tried to really deal with the ones who are struggling the most.

Years of experience have influenced and refined Ms. Hall's thinking. She acknowledged a perceived value in the background experiences of her students. Their experiences altered her perceptions and influenced her instructional practices. She

developed patience and learned to adapt her practices to the needs and experiences of her students. Her experiences speak to the importance of the connection between the adult learner and the classroom instructor.

Establishing the connection between instructors and students is valuable in building the instructors as empathic figures capable of understanding the academic and social realities faced by their students. The participants' expressions of feelings and behaviors consistent with caring as a part of their professional self-concepts demonstrated a willingness and a desire to foster positive relationships with their students; these positive relationships are fundamental to promoting learning. Their passion for their work and their sense of professional responsibility represent the foundation for effective teaching.

These instructors expressed their own perceptions of caring as it relates to their profession and to their students. They described feelings or behaviors that buttressed and illustrated those perceptions. The astonishing lengths of their individual careers within the profession are also a testament to their dedication—which also can be interpreted as a form of caring. Could an individual really dedicate 10, 15, 20, 25, or in some cases over 30 years to a profession without commitment to and caring for the people they serve?

The instructors established that they had a sincere and authentic interest in their students and their learning. It is that showing of interest, or care, that serves as another source of motivation for the students. The connection between the instructor and the learner is forged from attitudes and behaviors that exhibit the instructor's caring. As Ms. Lee noted, "I always greet the students. I always welcome the students into the class—

every student, everyday.” The notion of caring is more than an implied feeling; it should reflect tangible and observable behaviors that demonstrate that feeling to the student. Furthermore, caring instructors are more likely to help adult learners find that elusive academic success they seek. Helping adult learners find academic success is predicated upon many factors, but seemingly the most basic and fundamental of those factors was the prevalence of caring in shaping how this study’s participants viewed themselves professionally.

Management

When working with students with a wide variety of ages, academic backgrounds, and personal life stories, the adult educator certainly has to maintain order and foster an atmosphere conducive to learning for an array of individuals. Through their reflections and accounts, the study’s participants expressed how they saw themselves as managers and instructional leaders. Murray’s (2001) perspectives of the business setting provide a view relevant to the academic setting. She found that effective managers are able to set objectives, organize tasks and responsibilities, motivate and effectively communicate, measure and assess, and develop people. It could certainly be argued that teachers at any level assume similar—if not identical—responsibilities within their classrooms. In describing how they viewed themselves professionally, study participants displayed an uncanny likeness to individuals in positions of management in corporate structures.

First, Ms. Hall described a scenario consistent with what a manager in another context might encounter.

You just have to be flexible, and as I say, an adult educator has to be multifaceted. You have to deal with teens having family problems, single mothers and fathers having personal issues, students arguing with one another, boyfriend/girlfriend dramas—we have to address all those issues if you want to have any hope of

getting them to be productive. You want to present a positive environment for learning. You have to minimize all of the outside distractions in order to keep them focused on what's happening inside the classroom.

Mr. Jordan expressed similar concerns regarding the potential outside distractions that his students have faced.

So they come in here, and then they've got personal issues going on, and there is a lot of old baggage. They have difficult family lives, terrible things that have happened to them in their lifetime, trying to come back, trying to struggle with school, wanting to stay in school. Having all these pressures on them is intense.

Both Ms. Hall and Mr. Jordan expressed a sentiment common among instructors working in similar contexts. Many students come to class distracted by events or situations that take place outside of class. However, if these situations are not addressed by their instructors, those situations can become distractions for the students and even for the class as a whole. The distractions divert them from the academic focus and make it that much harder for them to concentrate and to be productive. Similarly, managers often act as counselors and listen to the personal issues of their workers. They provide support, encouragement, or even advice to minimize distractions and to ensure continued productivity from their staff. Ms. Hall spoke of the flexibility required of her to manage the outside distractions of her students. If these situations are not managed, the learning environment can be compromised.

Mr. Perry, a 15-year educator who has worked exclusively with adult remediation programs, offered a specific example that supports this perception.

I think just listening to them; find out what's holding them back—what's inhibiting them from moving forward. Again, it's a lot of outside things. To come to school and sit down, prepared, and on time—people take it for granted and think it's easy, but it's not for them. You know, we have single mothers that have to get kids to school. I have a student in my class who works 11:00 [p.m.] to 7:00 [a.m.], and class starts at 8:30 [a.m.]. So she comes here and falls asleep; so I recommended that she change her class schedule, go home, get a few hours of

sleep, and come in the afternoons. So you have to be able to work with them and see what's going on with them so that they could be successful.

Mr. Perry's experience suggests that he took the time to get to know the peripheral issues that influenced his students' participation in class. Understanding those issues and being flexible enough to provide accommodations and alternatives that allow for student persistence are keys for instructors. From Mr. Perry's perspective, the flexibility and understanding required to manage the unconventional and non-traditional student population he served are absolutely essential.

Ms. Holt described a similar perception that can be interpreted as an exhibition of her managerial skills.

I do emphasize that they must be here. They must participate and get the work done. They're not going to come here, do nothing, and expect to get the job done. As I have told my students, learning doesn't happen through osmosis. Just because you're sitting in this room doesn't mean you're going to get it. Just because you've signed up for the class doesn't guarantee anything. So, as an instructor, I try to get them to work, to feel like they play a part in a shared goal of success, and I try to give them different things to do so they stay involved and don't get bored. To get the most out of them, you have to get them involved and keep them productive.

Ms. Holt, like a good manager, saw it as her responsibility to motivate and get the most out of her students. She understood and emphasized the importance of class attendance, and she valued participation and involvement from her students. It is conceivable that many of her lessons were interactive and student-centered. She was also aware that students can become bored and can lose interest in mundane or repetitive activities. Could her notion of a "shared goal of success" equate to a company or department mission statement? A mission statement is typically a shared vision that declares organizational objectives and serves to motivate and inspire workers. By varying instructional delivery or classroom learning experiences, Ms. Holt increased the

likelihood of keeping her students motivated, engaged, and on task. Effective use of good management skills promotes student involvement and increases time on task. This makes time spent in the classroom more productive and efficient, and it increases the chances for academic gains.

Mr. Jordan seemingly described managerial traits when he described motivational tactics he employed and their subsequent effects.

On day one of a new semester, we not only review the syllabus, we modify the syllabus together. On every test I get them to feel that they're participating and that they have ownership in it. I really do, and I do it because it makes a difference to me and it makes a difference to them, so it works really well. We'll vote on every test. There will be no surprise tests. They buy into the program, plus they feel they have some control. The subject matter that I'm trying to get across . . . I can do that. The key here is to get them involved. It's not just my way or the highway.

First of all, Mr. Jordan displayed an example of flexibility that was a common thread among all of the participants. Rigidity is an undesirable characteristic for either a manager or a classroom instructor to possess. It may be exponentially worse for an instructor who deals with a unique population of students such as those of this study's participants. Similar to Ms. Holt, Mr. Jordan looked to motivate his students by getting them involved and making them feel as though they were a part of the whole process. This point is illustrated in the professional literature as well. Adult learning and motivation are strongly influenced by instructors who encourage inclusion and positive attitudes (Wlodkowski, 2008). Good managers encourage communication and participation, and Mr. Jordan effectively conveyed that through his accounting.

The professional literature has also highlighted other motivational abilities of the classroom instructor. "Motivating instructors are not entirely magical. They are unique; they do have their own style and strengths. But research, observation, and common sense

all point to essential elements that are the foundation of their instruction” (Wlodkowski, 2008, p. 49). In fact, he identified the motivating instructor as possessing the following characteristics: (a) expertise, (b) empathy, (c) enthusiasm, (d) clarity, and (e) cultural responsiveness.

The final characteristic he identified, cultural responsiveness, is an oft-discussed topic within the professional literature. It requires the classroom instructor to incorporate active teaching strategies that promote student engagement and participation (Gay, 2000). This point has been clearly evidenced through the perceptions of this study’s participants. Gay (2000) also argued that culturally responsive teaching can be transformative and empowering. Banks (1991) noted that for education to empower those who are marginalized, then it should, in fact, be transformational. Instructors should motivate and encourage students to “develop the knowledge, skills, and values needed to become social critics who can make reflective decisions and implement their decisions in effective personal, social, political, and economic action” (Banks, 1991, p. 131). This view of adult education and its instructors is seemingly supported as “adult education is generally intended to ameliorate the personal and social disadvantages created by one’s circumstances and background” (Nesbit, 2006, p. 1).

It appears as if Ms. Lee would concur with this line of thinking as evidenced through this accounting.

I do view education as a human right. And we as educators have a responsibility to support that right. I think someone recently said, actually several people have recently said, that education is the new civil rights issue. I think it’s always been a civil rights issue. . . . I believe that education is a liberator; education is a right.

Ladson-Billings (1995) also extolled the virtues of culturally responsive teaching as focused more on developing the whole individual and being both liberating and

emancipating. To further the point, Sleeter (1991) argued that education designed to emancipate or empower should go well beyond helping students in traditional academic ways; academic success is important, but the ultimate goal for this type of approach to education is to teach the learner to advocate both individually and collectively for issues related to social justice. Nesbit (2006) also noted that education for those who have been marginalized is often characterized by struggles; as a result, their instructors must help them to embrace the view that their education is a continuing personal and collective struggle for justice and a better world. So, although the most immediate or explicit goal for the instructor may be to foster academic gains for their students, the instructor, much like an effective manager, should also be interested in developing and facilitating growth and independence within people.

Unfortunately, managers must sometimes confront disciplinary issues with their workers. Mr. Ryan described his feelings on classroom discipline.

The minimum age to participate in our program is 16. Teenage students are kicked out of the public school system, so they feel as though they could come to adult ed and do as they please. In many cases, it's thought of as an easier route. I think I need to impose a lot of structure and discipline because it's necessary. The group that we deal with is the group that needs to be disciplined more than any other. So, I think it's our job to teach them to do what's right and proper to help them with what not to do. I also explain to them why I'm doing what I'm doing. That's the only way they're going to improve in school and in life in general.

For all of the focus on academic skills remediation and cognitive development, Mr. Ryan confronted the issues of classroom management and discipline head on. From his perspective, issues related to classroom management are prevalent in the context of adult education—especially with teenage students. Student behavior problems may have contributed to, or even been the result of, the absence of academic success in school. In many cases, however, behavior problems are the result of factors outside of the classroom

environment. In fact, risk factors such as poverty, family structure, and issues with self-esteem, when experienced in tandem, can lead to both learning and behavior problems with students (Luster & McAdoo, 1994). In Mr. Ryan's eyes, the instructor must provide the discipline and structure lacking in the students' lives in order to limit behavior problems and bring about substantive change within his students.

Ms. Caesar also addressed the issues of structure and discipline and offered strategies for potentially dealing with them.

Well, I think that setting the stage for your classes with informal interviews, where I go over the syllabus and classroom expectations, is important. Those things are very pertinent for setting the stage for what the course is going to be like, and they also help with classroom management. I think that if you set the stage early, that will help to curtail some of the potential inappropriate behavior.

She continued with another interesting account of a similar tenor. This time, she emphasized her role in the process.

I believe that when students know that I am prompt, that I am organized with my presentation and everything, they see as an instructor that I'm together and ready to go. Then I'm setting an example for them. So I believe in work ethic and setting the pace for how I would like them to behave. I want to be an example to them and provide the structure they may be lacking.

Like Mr. Ryan, Ms. Caesar expressed notions of management specifically related to structure and discipline. She looked to communicate policies, procedures, and expectations early on through her course syllabus in an effort to combat potential student discipline issues. This measure established leadership and authority instantly and abated any confusion on the part of the student as to what is and what is not acceptable. In fact, Kenner and Weinerman (2011) said that "a detailed syllabus that creates a direct step-by-step description of how the class will proceed should be attractive to goal-oriented adult learners" (p. 92). Furthermore, Ms. Caesar referenced social cognitive theory—specifically the use of direct modeling with her students. In essence, she looked to use

her perceived status to teach her students new behaviors or facilitate latent but existing behaviors (Bandura, 1997).

Ms. Hall also contributed an interesting perception related to student discipline.

They think getting a GED is the easy way out. They don't apply themselves, they skip classes, they come late, they leave early, and they come in with attitudes. I know some just come sometimes because the court sends them or because their parents make them come, and they are not fully involved in what's going on in the classroom. So they just bring their baggage with them which makes it more difficult not only for them, but it also makes it difficult for us to teach the rest of the class when you have to maintain discipline with those students.

When students look at adult education as an easy alternative to the K-12 system, they often do not take the program seriously and do not put forth the effort necessary to succeed. Subsequently, they become disengaged and are more likely to exhibit disruptive behaviors in the classroom. Examples of such disruptive behaviors include tardiness to class, missing class, excessive talking, and general inattentiveness to class proceedings (Smith, 1984). In response, teachers often misuse instructional time by disciplining students who exhibit these behaviors and, subsequently, spend time reviewing and reinforcing classroom rules and procedures, redirecting the focus of disengaged learners, and repeating previously covered material for students who missed previous classes (Smith, 1984). Discipline problems can affect the individual student's learning, and, if not managed appropriately, can affect the learning of others within the class as well.

Discipline problems are less likely to occur in well-managed classrooms with engaging, effective instruction; conversely, teachers who struggle to manage classroom behavior issues are often ineffective classroom leaders and managers (Browsers & Tomic, 2000; Emmer & Stough, 2001). Failure to manage classroom behavior and discipline issues adversely impacts student achievement for at-risk students—many of whom end up in adult education programs for academic remediation (Donovan & Cross, 2002).

Another reason students become disengaged may be that they do not even want to be a part of the environment. Ms. Hall spoke of her students being seemingly forced to attend classes by their parents or through agents within the justice system. Students may then act out to show their displeasure and assert a level of independence they felt was taken away. They may also be reflecting the behaviors they see in the environments from which they come. This is especially true “if adult learners come from a community that lacks respect for authority figures, they will have difficulty submitting to the authority of the instructor and can be disruptive in class” (Kenner & Weinerman, 2011, p. 90). Classroom instructors must be aware that these situations exist within the adult education environment, and they must be prepared to manage these situations to protect the learning environment for all of their students.

In sum, these instructors saw themselves as confident, caring, and committed classroom managers dedicated to serving an underserved population of learners. Understanding how instructors in adult basic education perceived their roles in fostering student success first required an understanding of how they perceived themselves as professionals. First, the participants communicated issues related to the notion of teacher efficacy as they described how strong beliefs in their professional capabilities influenced their professional practices. Secondly, participants shared experiences and perceptions that symbolized caring. Instructors showed that they cared for their students in a variety of ways; their commitment to their profession and to their students cannot be quantified, but its impact on factors that influence student achievement seemed substantial. Finally, study participants expressed professional responsibilities consistent with managers. Their

abilities to manage student production, motivation, and discipline were integral to student success.

How Instructors View Their Students

For many individuals, successful experiences fuel confidence. However, it is difficult to measure how consistent struggles and failures affect levels of confidence. For some individuals, those negative experiences create feelings of doubt and trepidation that may never be overcome. This study's participants have embraced the challenges associated with working with individuals who have experienced struggle and academic failure. In the natural course of their work, the instructors have developed perceptions regarding their students. Two key characteristics they perceived as salient were their students' lack of self-confidence alongside the experiential knowledge their students brought to the classroom.

Lack of Self-Confidence

Ms. Holt relayed a sobering account that addressed her perception of the low levels of self-confidence within the students she has taught.

Okay, the students in my courses have generally failed in the high school environment, and therefore, whether they are teenagers or adults up to the age of say 50, they come back with a feeling that they've failed and they may fail again. A lot of this is attributed to learning disabilities, emotional problems, peer pressure, or ridicule when they were in high school and they don't fit in. Another contributing factor is that they've moved around a lot and don't feel comfortable.

In her description, Ms. Holt identified factors that may have contributed to low levels of student self-confidence. Not only had students failed in their previous academic environments, but many anticipated and feared failing again. She specifically identified students with learning disabilities and emotional problems, as well as victims of derision or scornful mocking. Furthermore, she pointed to a lack of stability in their home lives.

All of these factors could be contributory to academic failure, which was probably the greatest factor in their diminished self-confidence. If students are made to feel out of place both academically and socially, perceive themselves as failures, and see no hope for improvement, how are they expected to persist and succeed?

Ms. Holt seemingly expounded on that sentiment.

They're uncomfortable admitting they can't do division, and they're uncomfortable realizing that they don't know when to capitalize words in a sentence. So I think that they have such poor self-esteem that telling them exactly what they can't do or showing them what they can't do makes them even more uncomfortable. I try to show them what they can do. So I try to give them some form of success.

Ms. Holt raised another interesting point. She perceived a sense of embarrassment from her students because of their failure to comprehend basic concepts. That embarrassment and lack of academic success contributed to poor self-esteem. To ease that embarrassment, she decided to adopt a more positive outlook and helped her students to view their situations more positively. Too often, instructors are focused on students' deficiencies as opposed to their strengths. That approach does not help the already shaken confidence of many adult learners. On the other hand, Ms. Holt's emphasis on her students' strengths should help to increase her students' self-confidence and may play a pivotal role in their ultimate success.

Similarly, Ms. Caesar communicated her perception of the lack of self-confidence she has observed within her students.

Well, in adult basic education, the students that we deal with come in, they've not been successful in their educational journey. When they come into adult basic education, I notice that many of them have low self-esteem because they've been unsuccessful in traditional classroom settings. It's my job to try and build them up because so many of them just don't believe in themselves. It's important that I earn their trust, but it's even more important that I get them to trust and believe in themselves.

In her position, Ms. Caesar literally encountered thousands of students who, for a multitude of reasons, were forced to discontinue their traditional K-12 educational pursuits. From her perspective, their past unsuccessful academic experiences have taken a collective toll on their self-confidence. It became a priority of hers to build their self-esteem and to try to offer these students a different experience in her classroom than they had experienced in their pasts. To her, the possibility of future academic success was predicated largely upon the confidence they needed to build in her as their instructor and also in themselves as students. Perhaps, a connection can be made between the perception of students' low levels of self confidence and the notion of academic self-efficacy. That notion is not without merit and is actually supported within the professional literature; in a study into academic self-efficacy, Pajares (1996) found that strong beliefs in academic self-efficacy strongly influenced levels of student motivation, learning, and achievement. Self-confidence and academic self-efficacy are two distinctly different constructs, but Ms. Caesar's observations evoke an implicit connection between them. Clearly, Ms. Caesar's professional practice was driven not only by her experience, but it had a foundation rooted in research as well.

Mr. Banks echoed a similar point and spoke on measures he had taken to build confidence within his students.

What I try to incorporate into my day is I always tell my students how proud I am of them. Many of my students have not been told this throughout their school years starting in elementary school. I try to encourage them to never give up and to believe that they can succeed. No matter the circumstances, they have to see some value in themselves and in their abilities to learn. So many of them just don't see that.

Not only did Mr. Banks describe feelings and actions consistent with caring through this account, but he also acknowledged his perception that an absence of self-confidence persisted with his students. He appeared to conclude that students entered his class defeated from their prior experiences in school. From his description, he looked to create a more positive experience for them in his class than he felt they may have had in other situations. He emphasized that each of his students had value and that they mattered to him. According to Mr. Banks, he reaffirmed his belief in his students daily and hoped that it would translate into a similar belief in themselves.

Mr. Banks also emphasized that he wanted his students to recognize that point for themselves. If the students did not feel as though they mattered, or that moving forward with their education mattered, they ultimately had little or no reason to persist. Mr. Banks' perception suggested that he looked to build self-confidence in his students where he believed little, if any, existed. Similar to Ms. Caesar, Mr. Banks clearly believed the potential for academic success for his students was highly dependent upon their beliefs in themselves. He perceived many of his students as lacking this belief, so he assumed the responsibility of helping them to realize that belief for themselves.

Just as it is important for classroom instructors to believe in their capabilities to teach their students, it is also important that their students believe in their own capabilities to learn and to succeed. More specifically, the perceptions communicated by Mr. Banks and Ms. Caesar reflected an absence of academic self-efficacy among their students. Bandura (1997) highlighted the importance of academic self-efficacy: students with higher levels of academic self-efficacy tend to set higher goals, to show more flexibility and interest in problem solving, and to possess a greater understanding of their own capabilities. The importance of self-efficacy suggests that it is beneficial for

instructors to identify students with lower levels of academic self-efficacy and to engage in activities to help those students build their academic self-efficacy. Those students would likely benefit from supportive and caring classroom instructors who promote student-centered, interactive classroom experiences.

Mr. Jordan also expressed how he viewed many of his students as bereft of self-confidence as they entered his classes. His detailed and heartfelt description and sudden shift to a more austere demeanor and tone during the interview signaled just how important he felt our discussion had become.

You have to show them they can make it. So many of them drop out just because they've had so many bad experiences in school, or they feel embarrassed that they haven't been successful in the past. I can name 2 or 3 here off the top of my head that are now in the nursing program here that I've known since they were in the GED program. That's where I first met them. But you have to use these past success stories to give your current students hope that they can do it, too. You've got to build them up so they stop feeling like failures and see that they can do it, too. . . . They've got attitudes, and they tell themselves they can't do this and that it's too difficult. We have tutors, a staff of tutors helping them along. We're trying to make them successful. We get them whatever remedial help they need. It's like I said, I was a faculty academic advisor. What is that? Well, there are five of us in the system. My job on day one is to start making phone calls, and if you got any problems, I don't care what it is, come see me. My door is open. Call me, send me emails for anything that happens, whether it be academic or something other than academic, that is interfering with your success in this school, and I take action

He seemingly addressed the issue again in a subsequent description.

I've seen students turn around and get excited about education and excited that they can achieve something. They've got a history of failure and difficult times in education. You have an attitude towards yourself that says you can't do. And when they can get in here and see that they can do more difficult things and that they can get through these things, I think we're helping them work through some self-esteem issues.

Mr. Jordan's descriptions again speak to issues of self-confidence that he perceived to exist with his students. This was evident as he described why he believed many of them discontinued their education. Feelings of embarrassment, brought upon by

negative experiences associated with their past educational endeavors, had robbed these students of any sort of confidence they may have once possessed.

However, Mr. Jordan recognized the importance of the issue and looked to employ the use of direct modeling to help those students (Bandura, 1997). Using other students as examples and chronicling their successful transitions into college let his current students know that individuals who came from similar circumstances did, in fact, persevere and make it into college. From his perspective, that strategy helped to motivate, encourage, and provide hope for his students that they could succeed as well. He also touched upon specific measures, like providing academic tutoring or faculty advisors, that the institution had in place to help these students. He perceived that his students saw themselves as failures with no hope of succeeding, but like the other study participants, he found it critical not only to identify those students, but also to take actions to help disabuse those students of that notion.

Ms. Webb, another life-long educator with over 30 years of experience teaching elementary school, college, and adult education, contributed an account that suggested a dearth of student self-confidence—or more specifically, academic self-efficacy.

I'm constantly engaging, ensuring that they are a part of the learning process. They'll never really understand what's going on if they're not a part of what's going on. That's when they get frustrated and just give up. They don't get it, and they don't think they can do it. They convince themselves it's impossible.

Ms. Webb described a similar scenario as the other instructors where she felt as if her students lacked the self-confidence needed to succeed. In her account, student frustration was linked to feelings of isolation from not being involved in the activities of the class. From her perspective, comprehension, retention, and application of classroom concepts are lost when the students are disengaged. This leads to frustration, which

ultimately, damages the students' sense of academic self-efficacy. Moreover, she suggested that this issue could also be a contributing factor to students dropping out of school altogether. Through this excerpt, Ms. Webb displayed a predilection for that interactive and student-centered mode of instruction as a means to guard against frustration and the potential loss of academic self-efficacy.

Knowledgeable

The population of learners served by this study's participants has experienced their share of academic disappointments. As a result, many of these learners have glaring academic skill deficiencies. The study's participants addressed what they perceived those deficiencies to be. Mr. Ryan intimated at a few of these deficiencies in mathematics.

Let me tell you—from my perspective, we've created a big problem. When children don't learn basic concepts early on like adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing, the problems only get worse as they get older. Giving a calculator to a kid to make things easier really just makes them worse. I get these students right out of high school that tell me they have problems with algebra, or they have problems with geometry. The truth is that they can't multiply or do long division. They've never understood fractions or percentages, so there is no way they were ever really in position to move forward. In many cases, they don't know what they don't know. I have to go in and lay a foundation all over again.

Ms. Lee expounded upon the deficiencies she has observed with her students.

Some are functionally illiterate and are operating at a second or third grade level. They are very articulate; I find that many of the students that I work with are quite articulate, and often times it's easy to say that person's going to do well in the class. However, when it comes to actually taking the test and getting through the work, we find that's even more challenging because they think they know it all already and they don't have to work as hard. Others that aren't quite so articulate have real language acquisition and comprehension problems. Most of them cannot think critically, and they can't decipher what makes sense to them and what doesn't.

Both Mr. Ryan and Ms. Lee described rather chilling accounts of the academic deficiencies faced by their students. Mr. Ryan suggested that the issues his students encountered in math were actually deep beneath the surface and incomprehensible for

most of his students. He identified a lack of fundamental understandings of multiplication and division as a genesis for subsequent difficulties in math. For example, a common source of frustration for many students is fractions. However, skills such as finding a least common denominator, cross canceling, and reducing are all dependent upon an ability to multiply and divide whole numbers. Mr. Ryan seemingly views the use of calculators in early grades as makeup to cover deficiencies that are not being properly addressed. By the time he encounters these students, their blemishes have been exposed, and he is left to help these students build the fundamental skills necessary to comprehend more advanced topics in math.

Ms. Lee, like Mr. Ryan, expressed that many of her students were not aware of, or simply did not understand, what their deficiencies were. She suggested a lack of metacognition, or made reference to the fact that her students did not have a good understanding of their own thinking. It may be even worse for her more articulate students because they failed to acknowledge their deficiencies altogether.

Mr. Banks offered a similar perspective addressing the academic deficiencies of his students.

When I talk about low, I have students that are reading and doing mathematics and language arts who've been out of school for 5 years or 10 years, and who have maybe dropped out at the ninth grade level in high school. They were obviously, to me, socially promoted because they're reading at the first, second, no higher than the third grade level.

In light of these descriptions, it might appear strange that the participants viewed their students as being knowledgeable. Clearly, the instructors were cognizant of and acknowledged their students' academic shortcomings. However, these shortcomings serve as an apparent antithesis for the perceived knowledge instructors feel their students

possess and bring with them into the classroom. This knowledge, while not academic in nature, can still prove quite valuable. Many would disregard the intellectual prowess of these students, but this study's participants shared perceptions that would attest to the contrary.

For example, Mrs. Holt shared this experience when dealing with students in her mathematics class.

In math, the biggest problem is word problems. Sometimes they can deal with basic calculations, but they don't always understand the word problems. But most of my older students have bought cars, paid taxes, or borrowed money from a bank. Situations that they've already experienced are more realistic to them than examples from the book. When you can relate their life experiences to the material, it makes it easier for them to understand. They're bringing something to the table without even knowing it.

This revelation suggests that Ms. Holt valued the life experiences of her students, and she equated those life experiences with student background knowledge. She attempted to use those experiences as an aid in presenting new concepts in math. The students may not relate to the examples within the text, but concepts such as finding sales tax or calculating simple interest may seem more palatable when students realize it to be a part of their daily existence. Ms. Holt recognized the knowledge her students possessed in the form of life experience, and she used that knowledge to facilitate classroom instruction. In fact, this point is supported in the professional literature. Effective education can be viewed as the result of students recognizing their own knowledge and abilities and using them as the foundation for continued development and personal growth (Allen, 1988).

Mr. Banks offered a similar perception as he also acknowledged a notion that his students contributed a certain amount of knowledge to the classroom experience.

Well, regarding their skill levels and abilities, I would say that my students bring a lot of life skills to the classroom setting. Although they may be academically challenged, they have skills in life and in survival that help them with their academics. It does help to know that they had some experiences in life that have encouraged them to understand the importance of education.

Similar to Ms. Holt, Mr. Banks also valued the life experiences of his students.

He equated their life skills to skills necessary for basic survival. Those skills may not necessarily equate to academic attainment, but skilled instructors may be able to utilize those skills to their advantage and to the advantage of their students. The students' knowledge and life experiences can be used to promote logic and critical analysis which are essential for more reflective and interactive models of instruction. Initially, these survival skills may help to compensate for the students' lack of content knowledge and supply confidence to mask the academic deficiencies that exist. However, those academic deficiencies still persist, and they would seemingly create an intriguing duality with the notion that these students are knowledgeable.

The professional literature also acknowledges the skills and knowledge that adult learners bring to this context. Their knowledge and prior life experiences can be used by their instructors as resources to help other students within the classroom setting; furthermore, as many adult learners define their identities through their experiences, instructors who ignore their students' experiences run the risk of alienating those students and creating feelings of rejection within the students (Whiting, Guglielmino, & Burrichter, 1988). This may also serve as a harbinger for potential problems with learner engagement and subsequent persistence. Prior learner experiences, sometimes wrought with misconception and prejudice, are still valuable and can be enhanced through meaningful social interaction and well-designed classroom learning opportunities (Knowles, 1984; Whiting et al., 1988). It is paramount that instructors, especially those

working in similar contexts to this study's participants, recognize the skills their students bring to the classroom, for these students have little else to bolster their pride and dignity other than their experiences (Knowles, 1984).

Ms. Lee gave an accounting that would suggest that she perceived her students as being knowledgeable as well.

Just getting by and making ends meet—those are skills that have gotten them through life. Those are survival skills that have gotten them through. They've grown to be resilient, even if they don't realize it. . . . Some come back when they're 50 or 60 years old. So I look at that as strength to try to continue this process, even though it may never happen for them. But I know that can be defined as strength somewhere.

Ms. Lee, similar to the others, offered a perspective that suggests her students' survival and life skills have contributed to the knowledge base of her students.

Consistent with constructivist principles, that prior knowledge is essential to help students make sense of new academic experiences (Piaget, 1950). Furthermore, she introduced the characteristic of resilience which, clearly, not all students possess. She implied that persistence, in spite of prior failures, can actually serve as a source of resolve, or strength. Their past unsuccessful academic experiences have taught the students to be resilient, and that they can come back and make another attempt at success. Where others may be deterred by failure, Ms. Lee's accounting suggests that her students are actually knowledgeable, and they have exhibited that knowledge through their continued perseverance.

Although traditionally thought of as academically incapable, adult learners seeking remediation are seemingly viewed by this study's participants as knowledgeable contributors to the classroom environment. They may lack formal academic knowledge of concepts and rudimentary skills, but their life experiences and survival skills are still

valued by their instructors. These skills can even be utilized to help develop the academic skills these students lack. The study's participants shared a common view that recognized the value inherent in the abilities and skills their students actually did possess. It appears as if they have adopted a more humanistic view of their students as knowledgeable and independent learners; that view then serves as an impetus for decisions related to classroom instruction and student development.

Instructional Strategies to Promote Learning

Thus far, the study's participants have illustrated how they view the primary participants within the classroom setting—themselves and their students. Their perceptions are imperative to shaping the instructors' role in fostering success for their students. Next, the participants shared strategies or techniques they felt were effective with their students. Either explicitly or through implication, several participants expressed the importance of helping their students see the relevance of their education beyond the confines of the classroom.

Establishing Relevance

When students are disengaged, they lose motivation and miss out on learning opportunities. One way to keep the students engaged is to attempt to make the information relevant to the students' experiences (Knowles, 1980). Study participants shared perspectives that seemingly supported this notion. For example, Ms. Holt communicated her perspective.

In math sometimes, I try to relate it to something in their own life like buying gas, or going to the store, or buying themselves an outfit. You know, things like getting a loan for your car. I try to relate a lot of the stuff to their own life, so they understand where it's coming from.

Ms. Holt's account reflected a calculated effort to relate course content to the

everyday real-world experiences of her students. By showing students how coursework can be applied to their own experiences, Ms. Holt overtly acknowledged the importance of learner engagement to the learning process. Many students simply do not see the importance of acquiring skills they view as useless to them. However, demonstrating the utility of those skills and showing their relevance to the students' lives is a key element in promoting learner engagement.

Mr. Banks offered a slightly different perspective that relayed a similar message.

The lack of community to embrace young people as well as to encourage them has contributed to many students failing. I would not want think of our high schools today as dropout factories, but the numbers, and I don't have the statistics in front of me, aren't good. Our high schools are suffering because our students are suffering. We must, as educators, find alternative ways to educate our students and to embrace them. I want my students to understand that education is bigger than just the classroom. They are a member of their community—they are a member of society.

Ms. Lee expounded on that notion.

I know I challenge most of them. For example, we read news articles and then engage in debates. We pick sides, you know, we have a pro side and the con side, and we discuss specific current issues such as immigration, or public smoking, or the environment. I know it's challenging for them, but it also gives them the opportunity to read, to practice that skill set, to learn the vocabulary, and it also gives them an opportunity to think critically. They reflect on their values and their place in society and also how they experience society. I'm a big person on real-world application. So I believe that most, if not all, educational activities should be applied specifically to adult learners and their real-world experiences.

Both Mr. Banks and Ms. Lee expressed similar perspectives that emphasized the importance of making learning relevant for their students. Mr. Banks stressed that educational activities should encourage students to be part of their communities. Ms. Lee spoke specifically of using debate to have students reflect on their values and standing within society. Both encouraged reflection and the development of critical thinking skills. Their descriptions indicated a preference for activities that stimulate more higher-

order thinking and deemphasize isolated skill acquisition. Their perceptions are perhaps best illustrated in a 1997 study into teen pregnancy and dropout prevention; it was suggested that a significant reduction in school failures could be achieved through student involvement in community service projects and peer tutoring programs (Allen, Philliber, Herrling, & Kuperminc, 1997). Classroom instructors, such as Mr. Banks or Ms. Lee, would then engage students in class discussions about their service experiences. This would seemingly help to promote self-reflection and develop critical analysis. Their affinity for real-world application and their desire to give classroom activities social relevance suggests both Mr. Banks and Ms. Lee would concur with this research finding.

How do instructors go about creating learning tasks that are relevant to the experiences of their students? It is much easier if that instructor develops some type knowledge or insight into the student; for example, learning a student's likes and dislikes, prior educational experiences, or even employment status. In fact, this type of information is easily obtained by having students construct autobiographies (Guillaume & Kirtman, 2005). Instructors stand to gain invaluable insight into learners' experiences that can be used to construct learning tasks they are more likely to perceive as relevant to them. Ms. Hall seemingly exemplified this notion with her descriptive account.

The student completes a little autobiography to tell me a little about themselves, and after the student fills that out, I read that, and I am able to launch a dialogue with that student. For example, the other day there was a student who said that she lived in Fargo, North Dakota, and because of the fact that I lived there many many years ago, I was able to establish a rapport with that student and ask this student certain things about Fargo, North Dakota, and so forth. So by doing that, I set a stage for the student to ease into a little informal interview. I'm also able to determine the student's learning style and to determine what the student needs as it pertains to the classroom and also needs outside the classroom. For example, is there a childcare problem? Is there a family issue that would be detrimental, you know, to the student coming to class? Is there a transportation issue? So by

establishing this dialogue and this rapport with this student, I'm much better able to work with them because I know something about them.

Ms. Hall didn't simply state that it was important to get to know her students. She described how she accomplished this feat and how it benefited her as an instructor. Having the students create autobiographies allows for self-reflection and critical analysis with the learners, but Ms. Hall also spoke of the inherent and, perhaps, latent benefits this learning task provides for the instructor. She used the information she garnered from the assignment to begin an informal dialogue. Engaging students in dialogue could potentially yield useful insight into student needs, work habits, and interests; this information can then be used in constructing learning activities students see as meaningful to their individual progress and development (Noddings, 2002). Ms. Hall explicitly spoke of how that dialogue can help to put the students at ease, but that dialogue implicitly serves an even greater purpose—it helps to engage those reluctant learners and make them feel part of the classroom environment. Information yielded from the assignment and subsequent dialogue can potentially alert instructors to student learning preferences or perceived instructional deficits; this information can be used to create learning opportunities that more accurately reflect students' experiences and keep them engaged.

Ms. Hall was clearly a proponent of dialogue with her students on an individual basis, but she also advocated the importance of dialogue with her students collectively. This is perhaps best evidenced through her classroom discussions regarding topical and relevant current events.

I usually come in, and I would start my day with a discussion of a current event. What happened last time you watched the news? The situation in Haiti— and we had the earthquake in Haiti. A lot of students could identify with that. So we

started the day off with, I wouldn't call it trivia, but current events to bring everyone together.

Ms. Caesar shared an interesting perception that also addressed the topic of making classroom content relevant to student experiences.

Well, they have seen few connections between educational ideas presented in the classroom and real world, real life situations. They haven't—many of them, of course, with the lower grade levels have not learned foundations as far as academics are concerned, and their life experiences have been limited because they just haven't been exposed to much beyond their neighborhoods. They've grown up poor, and they haven't been exposed to much besides what's going on around them.

Ms. Caesar, much like the other participants, alluded to a perceived chasm between her students' prior formal learning experiences and their actual real-world experiences. However, she went on to offer a unique perspective on the experiences of some of her students. She spoke of the challenges presented by the limited life experiences of some of the students. It was important for her to make class content relevant to their experiences, but she perceived those experiences as being strongly and adversely influenced by a lack of exposure to the world outside of their own neighborhoods. This perception is reflected within the professional literature as well. Students from impoverished backgrounds are not often exposed to the same after school and summer enrichment experiences as middle-class students; these experiences help to develop self-confidence and foster a broader context and appreciation for learning (Rothstein, 2004). In many cases, these students have been perceived to be discipline problems in the K-12 system, and they did not receive the attention or guidance they needed. In fact, disruptive behavior is often associated with students from poverty in early grades (Kellam, Ling, Merisca, Brown, & Ialongo, 1998). Students are labeled at

an early age and continue to fall farther and farther behind; eventually, these students end up in adult education looking for help.

Helping her students to master academic concepts and skills was clearly important, but Ms. Caesar also perceived her students' lack of exposure to the world beyond their limited experiences, perhaps as a result of situational or even generational poverty, as a hindrance in making learning relevant to them. Students who are economically disenfranchised and lack basic literacy and math skills rarely engage in casual or formal discourse on subjects such as travel, finance, government, or education. Ms. Caesar recognized these deficits and looked to address them in an effort to bring relevance to her students' classroom learning experiences.

Mr. Perry expressed a similar desire to link classroom learning to the real-world experiences of his students, thus making the learning more meaningful and relevant to his class.

We try to have like a little warm up opening session, help them pick up life skills, something teaching how it relates to the real world. So they can see the value in coming here, learning something useful to their lives. You want them to see that light in the tunnel that hey, maybe they can make a little money, maybe they can buy a new car, maybe they can leave a bad neighborhood and buy themselves a house, take a vacation two years from now. We talk about budgeting; we talk about the value of having a high school diploma.

Mr. Perry acknowledged the perceived value of bridging the gap between academic content and real-world life experience to bring relevance to classroom learning. He wanted his students to see beyond the physical four corners of the diploma and recognize the opportunities that it potentially presents. Like Ms. Caesar, Mr. Perry understood that his students may never have been previously exposed to such life skills as personal finance or budgeting. By guiding his students into exploration of these skills and concepts that are germane to their everyday experience, he helped to bring relevance

to their learning and increase the likelihood of school persistence. He provided a tangible value and motivation not only for class attendance but also for individual engagement.

Perspectives from study participants suggested an emphasis be placed on connecting classroom content to learner experiences in order to make learning appear more meaningful and relevant to the students. Participants expressed how they recognized prior student learning and life experiences and how they used that knowledge to design classroom activities to reflect those experiences. Students were encouraged to think critically, analyze, and apply classroom learning to their own lives and the world around them. Whereas students may have been disengaged in past formal educational experiences, the instructors' efforts to bring meaning and relevance to their current learning experiences may stimulate persistence and foster engagement.

Establishing a Community of Learners

In many remediation settings, not only are skills taught in isolation, but so are the students. Individualized one-to-one instruction has its benefits, but it should not be practiced exclusively. Study participants seemingly acknowledged an emphasis on social interaction and its benefits for their students.

Ms. Caesar offered a reflection indicative of this notion.

Additionally, we group together. I love the collaboration of students networking together because many of them can bring some great experiences in, or many of them are very well versed in some of the skills that we work on. So I believe in the networking and the partnerships. You have to manage the situation and stay on top of things, but it makes some of them feel good to be able to explain or help another student that's having difficulty. I also think it's easier for them to take criticism from one another than from me.

Ms. Caesar seemingly advocated for student interaction in her classes. She also

identified several benefits to its employ. She spoke of the experiences that different students brought to the group dynamic, and she also spoke of how students with sufficient knowledge of the skill being practiced could be used to assist others who were struggling. Furthermore, she alluded to the good feelings students experienced when they were able to offer assistance. Earning the trust of the instructor and their fellow classmates may engender confidence or even augment levels of academic self-efficacy. However, as Ms. Caesar mentioned, the interactions must be managed and monitored. The instructor must ensure that students remain on task and that the explanations, examples, and help being offered are appropriate and accurate for the learning objective. Another important point she addressed relates to student perception of criticism. Students often perceive instructor feedback and communication as overly-critical and harsh. However, assistance from a peer is more often welcomed and viewed as being more positive in nature. By encouraging group investigation and discovery, Ms. Caesar created an interactive learning community beneficial to all of her students.

Mr. Perry offered a similar accounting:

We do several things. We have discussions. We have lectures. We try to have class involvement. Sometimes I let the students teach the class. I'll give them a topic like reducing fractions. They go to the blackboard and I'll have problems up for them to solve and explain how they solved them. The other students then have a chance to check their work for mistakes. It creates conversation, and they're being productive learning from each other's mistakes.

Mr. Perry described a scenario similar to Ms. Caesar. In his accounting, although he only selected one student to go to the blackboard, the other students were encouraged to follow along and check for mistakes. He mentioned how this created conversation. Teachers who create true learning communities within their classrooms both implicitly and explicitly encourage open communication, dialogue, and reflection (Liston &

Garrison, 2004). The students were working collaboratively to solve problems, to identify and correct mistakes, and to foster deeper understanding. For this exercise to accomplish its goal, the instructor, as Ms. Caesar said, must manage the proceedings to ensure that the students stay on task and that the information being disseminated is correct.

The type of activity described by Mr. Perry is seemingly lauded within the professional literature. Group discussions, simulation exercises, and problem-solving activities are all strongly encouraged to promote engagement and meaningful learning with adult students (Whiting et al., 1988). However, the instructors must understand that they are not the focus of the exercises. The student, and not the instructor, is the focus within the classroom (Eggen & Kauchak, 2006; Knowles, 1984). Learning activities are designed to be more student-centered and interactive. Instructors must encourage participation from all students and allow for mistakes; the learning occurs through the social interaction (Vygotsky, 1962/1986). The students learn not only from the mistakes of themselves and their peers but also from the encouragement of the class. Clearly, Ms. Caesar and Mr. Perry seemed to value the aspect of social interaction within their classes and used it to create learning communities.

The collaborative practices and dependence upon social interaction suggested by the present study's participants triggered the idea of a learning community. Within the professional literature, definitions of a learning community vary marginally; however, they communicate similar characteristics. Learners within a learning community share common goals and values and are actively engaged in learning from one another (Tinto, 1997; Vygotsky, 1962/1986). Study participants acknowledged that while academically challenged, many of their students brought a variety of experiences and experiential

knowledge to the classroom setting. Combining that experiential knowledge with concepts and skills introduced in the classroom puts students in the position to collaborate with one another and share knowledge, solve problems, and provide support for one another (Tinto, 1997; Vygotsky, 1962/1986).

Mr. Banks also described a perception of a learning community he developed within his classes.

I encourage the students to work with one another because I know that often, when you learn from your peers, the instruction may be much more easily understood than it would be from myself. Even though I try to keep it simple, students have a way of connecting and simplifying things even sometimes more than myself. I can introduce it, and if you get it, you may be able to break it down for your buddy that's struggling.

Mr. Banks identified and communicated an inherent value in collaborative learning and social interaction. He perceived that other students sometimes communicated and disseminated information better to their peers than he could because they were able to simplify the information in a way he simply could not. In essence, while the message may be the same, the perception of the messenger may actually be an influence on student learning. He conceded that all students did not understand a skill or concept when introduced; however, by encouraging his students to work collaboratively, he increased the likelihood of comprehension for some of the students who may not have grasped the content initially. He also abated the potential for student embarrassment or anxiety. Unfortunately, many students who need clarification or additional assistance do not seek such assistance because they feel ashamed or embarrassed. Allowing his students to seek the help that they needed from more knowledgeable or skilled peers enabled Mr. Banks to promote student interaction, knowledge acquisition, skill development, learner engagement, and critical analysis.

Ms. Hall also shared a description of an activity that symbolized a belief in the use of learning communities within her classroom.

I have brought in something that we do in the public schools that is called a thinking map. But more people know them as graphic organizers. There are different techniques for using these graphic organizers now because they help identify and emphasize specific skills such as sequencing and contrasting and cause and effect and, you know, the different facts and opinions, details, and main ideas. So you use a lot of these graphic organizers and thinking maps along with the some of the stories that they're reading. I let them work in small groups of three or four and let them share their ideas with each other. Then we come together as a group and combine our ideas to help them think about what they're reading and discussing and maybe be more successful in extracting an answer or comprehending what they are reading. I really think they get a lot out of it.

A graphic organizer, or thinking map as Ms. Hall described, is typically used by an individual to give help, organize thinking, and further understanding. However, Ms. Hall maintained that she encouraged her students to work together to construct this thinking map. As a result, they were seemingly able to use input from their peers to help develop their own thinking and understanding of text. In theory, the students should have been able to interact and exchange ideas. Once Ms. Hall convened the class as a whole, the small groups were able then to accept and offer feedback to everyone else. From Ms. Hall's perspective, the goal of comprehension was aided by the critical thinking and sharing of ideas fostered by this specific group activity. A graphic organizer can be constructed individually, but the benefits associated with constructing and sharing the thinking map with peers probably made the activity even more beneficial for Ms. Hall's students. This would appear consistent with Liston and Garrison's (2004) view of a learning community promoting communication, social interaction, and individual reflection.

Ideals and philosophies provide a backdrop for informed instructional practice. However, ideals and philosophies alone do not promote student learning and success;

specific instructional strategies and techniques designed to promote learning and success must be identified and put into practice. Study participants highlighted specific measures taken in their classrooms to facilitate academic success within the adult learning context. They identified a need to make classroom learning relevant to the real-world experiences of the students; as a result, instructors incorporated current events and engaged their students in debate and classroom dialogue. One instructor even proffered the idea of having students construct autobiographies. Not only do the autobiographies promote self-reflection and critical analysis, but they also provide the instructor with valuable insight into the student's experience. That insight can then be used to inform future practices related to curriculum and instructional design which more accurately reflect student experiences.

Challenges to Student Learning

Thus far, study participants have identified how they viewed themselves, how they viewed their students, and what measures they took to help those students succeed. Finally, study participants identified potential challenges to student academic success. The first of those challenges is no stranger to anyone—the simple, yet entirely complex, challenges presented by everyday life.

Life Happens

Study participants consistently identified situations that they felt hindered the prospects for student success. These situations could simply be interpreted as responsibilities and challenges associated with everyday life. This notion was best epitomized through Ms. Lee's description.

Life—all these life issues, and I don't accuse them of anything. Students may pop up in my class once a week. Some are there every day; others pop up twice a

week or once every couple of weeks. You know, they give you all these reasons about this and that—you know, they were in jail, you know, couldn't find a babysitter, and had to get a job— life. And I'm completely fine with that, and my response to them is life is happening right now all around us. Now what decisions do we make to handle those situations and still meet our priorities and responsibilities?

Ms. Lee introduced several key points in her description. She made a point to acknowledge the fact that she did not direct any accusations towards her students, nor did she openly question some of their inconsistent or questionable attendance patterns. She understood and accepted why students missed classes, but that did not change the fact that, from her perspective, her students missed out on opportunities to practice and develop their skills. Her tone and change in facial expression indicated that, over the span of her career, she had heard these same reasons many times over. She seemed to project a genuine sense of empathy for her students and their challenges in school attendance, but she also expressed a need for students to exercise good judgment and to make decisions conducive to meeting their priorities. For example, incarceration is a mitigating factor that would impede school attendance. However, the negative behaviors that lead to incarceration are within our control, and the consequences from those behaviors preclude class participation and, ultimately, hinder the potential for success. It is not an issue of placing blame on the students for their failures, but how they are prepared to deal with life's challenges, and persistence in spite of them, is key to their ultimate success.

Ms. Holt's accounting seemingly dovetailed with Ms. Lee's sentiment.

You get the ones that are really determined to do this, and they may be here most of the time. You get students who show up, come a few days, say they're going to work really hard, and they're going to be here. And then they start coming fewer and fewer days, and then they disappear. . . . And that happens with not only younger, as you would say, high-school students; it also happens with the

older people. The biggest challenge is getting them to come to class. . . . If they come up with excuses why they can't be here, or if they breeze in for an hour or so and leave, I can't really work with them. The biggest problem is having them actually in the classroom. Once I have them in the classroom and they're focused, then I can work with them and help them.

Ms. Holt's description was surprisingly similar to that of Ms. Lee. She described a disconnect between the stated intentions of her students and their actions. She spoke of how when students initially entered class, they articulated positive intentions and ambitions for school. However, as time progressed, student attendance began to wane. Perhaps the inconsistencies with attendance could be attributed to the life challenges Ms. Lee alluded to previously.

Both Ms. Lee and Ms. Holt would seemingly concur on the point that these life challenges disrupted the continuity of instruction, and they hindered class participation. From the student perspective, classroom instruction may appear disjointed and confusing. The lack of continuity resulting from their absences inhibits any real progression. Students begin to feel disengaged from the class and allow these life challenges to quell their stated desires to further their education. It is incumbent upon the classroom instructor to understand that the life challenges faced by their students are not unique, but many are not equipped with the knowledge or support systems to help them overcome those challenges. To augment their chances for success, the instructors must take an interest in the lives of their students and understand the potential for extenuating circumstances. The instructors cannot be expected to solve all of their students' problems, but they can serve as a resource to provide emotional support, empathy, and encouragement to persist. Without that, students become consumed by adversity, and persistence is extinguished.

Ms. Gomez offered a similar description that highlights the problems she has observed with student absences and their negative effects on the potential for student success.

For the most part, most of my students have succeeded. The only ones that I would say have not succeeded are the ones that are not consistent with their attendance. If they don't come to my class, they are really not going to succeed. If they don't complete assignments, homework assignments, class assignments—they're not going to succeed. If they're not able to cooperate, they're not going to succeed. Other than that, if they come to class and take it seriously and do their work, they are going to succeed.

Ms. Hall, however, offered a stark recollection that explicitly illustrated the genuine hardships and struggles faced by many adult learners.

Yes, I had this one student who was really trying to come in and make some progress towards getting a GED because he had a family. With the recession going on, he was not working a full-time position. He was getting odd jobs here and there, and he was really struggling. The house was in foreclosure. Their lights and the water were always being threatened to be turned off, and he was really trying to make ends meet. They were struggling because the jobs are just not out there. And now this particular student had gotten to a breaking point where his life had just—it just became one that he apparently felt that he wasn't being as productive as he wanted to be as a father and a husband. So he was going through some changes and he had gotten away from his family and he did some things that were really, as my three years knowing him as a student, were unheard of. But with this recession going on, you know, people are just doing some crazy things, and he was doing some things that I was sadly aware of. As a teacher, I tried to help them financially. I helped them with a couple of their bills. I knew he was trying to make it and he was trying to do well, so when you see someone that is trying, you do what you can do for that person.

The challenges of everyday life were clearly reflected through Ms. Hall's heartfelt anecdote. She described a student thrust back into school while trying to navigate through the perils of poverty. In the current economic climate, home foreclosures, job loss, and excessive personal debt have become commonplace. This student lost full-time employment due to an economic downturn and felt that further education and training would aid in the search for more substantive employment. However, bills do not take a

respite while one pursues an education. The trials this young man faced typify those of individuals struggling to survive in relative poverty; individuals from relative poverty often have limited access to cultural activities, health care, and quality educational opportunities (Sachs, 2005). Unfortunately, Ms. Hall intimated that this student, as is the case with many others, may have turned to illicit or illegal activities as a way out of his financial quandary. Ms. Hall seemingly recognized the strain the student was under and empathized with his struggle to continue his education. She apparently felt compelled to act and actually provided financial assistance to the family to ease his burden.

It would be irresponsible and utterly remiss to suggest that classroom instructors act as financial benefactors for all of their students. However, the pitfalls and challenges produced by a life of poverty are a very tangible and ominous detriment to participation and persistence in adult education programs. In K-12 literature, poverty is considered as one of the leading contributors to school failure (Orfield & Lee, 2005; Rothstein, 2004). This issue is only magnified in adult education as these academically unsuccessful children have become adults with additional pressures and hardships resulting from economic struggles. Their participation in learning programs can be viewed as an investment in human capital that yields not only intrinsic but tangible, socioeconomic rewards as well (Baptiste, 2001). Perhaps fulfilling the initial intentions and aspirations of Jane Adams well over a century ago, education is a vehicle for these individuals to escape the snares and trappings of a lifetime of poverty (Jeynes, 2007). Poverty expropriates both economic and intellectual freedom, and it promotes generations of individuals devoid of the skills and knowledge to challenge social inequities; subsequently, the divide between rich and poor continues to widen (Sachs, 2005).

Ms. Hall may have resorted to an extreme, and even impractical, measure to satisfy an immediate student need, but her intent was laudable. As an instructor, she recognized the challenge faced by her student, and she tried to offer support and provide a means for persistence. In reality, she provided a temporary solution to an appreciably greater problem, but the intent behind her act was to help her student overcome a life challenge and persist in educational pursuit.

Ms. Caesar identified several common life challenges faced by her students, and she offered her own anecdote similar to the one provided by Ms. Hall.

Well, I'd say one problem that we encounter in adult education is that our students have so many different things going on outside of school such as transportation, child care, legal issues. . . . I just had a student yesterday whose bus pass ran out—a very good student. But he is not financially able to attend. So we do have some factors in their transportation, or it could be child care, or it could just be a number of things that makes it difficult for them to succeed. And we find that many of those students will start out at a given semester, and they'll drop—stop out, let me say. Then you'll see them again in another term or another year. So, they really want to achieve, but then these factors that, such as I mentioned, make it difficult for them to succeed.

First, Ms. Caesar identified several common life challenges she perceived as obstacles to her students' participation in classes. Clearly, Ms. Caesar, much like the other participants, viewed non-attendance and what she deemed to be excessive absences from class as major hindrances to academic development. And it seems that many of the contributory factors to those absences emanate from the trials of everyday life. For example, Ms. Caesar expressly identified challenges such as transportation, child care, and legal issues. Mr. Perry offered a complementary perspective.

Like I said, the outside things like transportation, child care, job—life has caught up with them. And so their focus is on that and not on coming here and being a student. They're worried about other things, but when they are focused on education, they tend to do better.

Challenges such as these are identified in the professional literature as situational barriers that often lead to adult learners dropping out of school (Cross, 1992). Individuals like the young man Ms. Caesar described did not even have the money for public transit; without a means to get to class consistently, students are then unable to take part in classroom learning experiences. Others with young children who cannot afford or cannot obtain childcare services due to scheduling conflicts are not able to attend classes consistently either. The fallout from legal transgressions like scheduled court dates, hearings, probation commitments, and intermittent periods of incarceration disrupt the continuity of class attendance as well. In essence, these students become prisoners of the trappings their circumstances have created for them. Their instructors are then asked to help these individuals find academic success, but their participation in the process is limited by a litany of factors beyond the control of the classroom instructors. The instructors cannot control these circumstances, but they can be cognizant of their presence and impact on the educational pursuits of their students.

Lack of Student Commitment

Study participants clearly viewed their students' inability to meet the challenges and responsibilities of everyday life to be an obstacle to their academic development. Participants also seemingly identified a lack of commitment from their students as another significant obstacle. The instructors shared perceptions and views that communicated this point.

Ms. Hall explicitly articulated this sentiment.

But the ones that find it most difficult to succeed are the ones that do not commit themselves, and they come in with an attitude that, you know, that they're only going to be here for a short period of time.

Ms. Hall touched upon a poignant point in her brief description. She spoke of a

perceived lack of commitment shown by her students in the adult learning environment. She seemingly attributed this lack of commitment to an attitude she believed existed among her students; completing a GED program is easier than obtaining a high-school diploma through traditional means. Some students feel that passing the GED test is a convenient and easy alternative to the years of study and discipline required to earn a high-school diploma through traditional means. The convenience that the test offers is unquestionable, but acquiring the skills needed to pass the test is not as easy as students envision. They quickly come to understand the rigor, discipline, and time typically needed to succeed in high school are needed in adult education as well. If students do not genuinely commit their efforts to learning and prioritize their learning, academic success will continue to elude them.

The remarks proffered by Ms. Hall show cause to question the students' level of commitment to persistence in their academic development. In a study of adult learner persistence, Darkenwald (1981) found that many students who dropped out of adult education programs perceived their participation in classes as a secondary event that could be done in their spare time; their attendance was viewed as a lower priority than the other more pressing needs and responsibilities in their lives. In essence, they viewed their education almost as a hobby or pastime. If students do not see their own learning as a priority, what chance do their instructors have of effecting any substantive change?

Mr. Perry offered his perspective that also suggested a lack of commitment from his students.

I guess them trying to make it important coming to school, being on time, and being prepared. We're here to help them move forward and be successful in something. . . . The lack of preparation and not being on time—that hurts their progress as students and would hurt you as far as being an instructor.

Mr. Perry's contribution communicated a perception that he had encountered students who were not completely committed to advancing their skills. He described actions exhibited by his students not conducive to academic development. Actions that involved missing classes, or being late to classes, or being unprepared for classes are indicative of mindsets or attitudes that prove to be self-destructive and counterproductive to success. In the professional literature, these attitudes are described as dispositional barriers to school and academic achievement (Cross, 1992). Mr. Perry also referenced the potential difficulties these dispositional barriers can create for the classroom instructors; they create potential problems with classroom management, learner engagement, and learner persistence. Students who come to class late are distractions to other students who are already engaged and engrossed in class proceedings. These distractions disrupt instructional momentum and detract from student focus. In short, the problems and challenges faced by an individual student can manifest themselves into behaviors that threaten the efficiency of the classroom learning environment for other students and the instructor as well.

Mr. Ryan's ruminations closely mirrored those offered by Mr. Perry.

If there's a problem, it's them getting there on time. I have students coming in halfway through some classes and others who show up with maybe 10 or 15 minutes left in the class. They act like class doesn't start until they get there. And I think that impedes the learning process. That impedes the efficiency in the classroom. It's not good for the classroom when students are constantly late on a regular basis. If they want to make it in college, if they want a good-paying job, if they want to keep a job, they've got to take this seriously and make more of an effort to get here and get here on time. They miss so much when they're not here, and they just keep falling further behind.

Mr. Perry and Mr. Ryan communicated similar sentiments. Mr. Ryan's comments, however, were more focused on student tardiness and its effects on the individual and the class as a whole. He stated that students needed to "take this

seriously,” which suggested a perception that a segment of his students were not committed to attending class on time. Most teachers find persistent tardiness to be a nuisance, but Mr. Ryan articulated its negative effects on learning. Students already in need of remediation who continue to miss significant and inordinate amounts of classroom instruction act as saboteurs to their own educational pursuits. In essence, how can students ever expect to get ahead when their behaviors push them further and further behind? Like Mr. Perry, Mr. Ryan also alluded to potential problems persistent tardiness causes for issues related to classroom management. He went on to project how, if not rectified, students’ lack of commitment could adversely affect not only prospects for college success, but students’ ability to gain and maintain substantive employment as well.

Mr. Perry also contributed a positive example of a student who, with the aid of instructor intervention, committed himself to change and more positive behaviors conducive to success.

Well, I have a couple of stories, but one of them comes to mind. A young man told me he was in ninth grade for three years, and he constantly got into trouble. So, the school told him he had to go. He would never get his 24 credits [required for high-school graduation], so he was already depressed over that. He had been in a gang and on juvenile probation. He came and acted like he just didn’t care—had a few run-ins with counselors here and a few run-ins with other students. So one day I sat down to talk to him, and we talked about what was important to him, what he wanted to do, and he opened up. He had goals of going to college and opening his own business, but he had been hindered. . . . He picked up bad habits—not going to class, not paying attention in class, getting kicked out of class. Anyway, he completed our adult ed program and got his GED, and now he is enrolled in the college.

The young man Mr. Perry described embodied many of the struggles faced by young people in adult education programs. He was dismissed from his traditional high school after repeated academic failures and a history of misbehavior and violence. After

enrolling in an adult basic education program, he continued to exhibit the same behaviors that marred his chances for success previously.

Mr. Perry saw the student's lack of commitment evidenced through the student's unruly behavior, poor class attendance, and indifferent attitude towards school. The student's behaviors could not be excused or justified, but they may have been influenced by an impoverished upbringing, academic failures, or the student's involvement in gang culture and activity. Mr. Perry's descriptions suggest that the student had become disengaged. Students who are disengaged from the process and activities of school often exhibit low academic achievement, disruptive and inappropriate behavior, and have low aspirations for academic success (Jordan, Lara, & McPartland, 1996). Too often, instructors look to disciplinary measures to immediately correct inappropriate behaviors; however, that does not address the underlying cause of those behaviors and does not bring about any genuine, substantive change. Keeping these students actively engaged in the process is essential to reducing the occurrence of, or completely eliminating, such behaviors altogether.

In lieu of scolding or chastising the student, which evidently had been unsuccessful measures employed in the past, Mr. Perry successfully forged a relationship with the student and got him to open up about his goals and possible career plans. As the instructor, Mr. Perry recognized that this young man was not committed to his educational pursuit; subsequently, he actively engaged the student in positive discourse to help direct the student's focus in a more positive and productive direction. This, by no means, is a solution to all of the problems adult education students face; however, Mr.

Perry's accounting showed it to be a viable option to employ when dealing with students who have not shown themselves to be committed in their educational pursuits.

Mr. Banks also identified students' lack of commitment as an issue, offering a strategy to help his students overcome this challenge.

I push my students to become professional students. I make them aware of that all the time, and I let them know that they must be professionals at all times. When they not only come into my classroom, but any classroom setting that they enter into, they must conduct themselves as professional students.

Mr. Banks went on to expound upon his vision of a professional student.

A professional student, to me, comes to class always prepared and on time. They keep their assignments organized. They prioritize the importance of an assignment. They understand the professionalism and the integrity in how it will carry over into their career interest, and they also exhibit that professionalism towards one another as they develop and improve their social skills. So, I would characterize a professional student as someone who is actually preparing for their career.

Mr. Banks characterized the positive behaviors and attitudes that he promoted within his students. He identified many of the same self-destructive student behaviors as the other participants, but he used that knowledge to influence a creative approach with his classes. He introduced and elaborated upon the notion of a professional student.

Essentially, instead of assuming the traditional role of an authority figure and telling students what they should not do, Mr. Banks looked to be more positive and proactive in encouraging his students in what they actually should do. For example, instead of berating students for their lack of preparation or tardiness, instructors may simply try, either subtly or explicitly, to show students how punctuality and preparedness are essential characteristics of successful students and people in general. In fact, this point is reflected in the professional literature; the argument is made that explicitly teaching skills like leadership and persistence is fundamental to fostering success for

adults (Rothstein, 2004). From Mr. Banks' perspective, professional students are the antithesis of students who lack commitment; they exhibit and continue to develop attitudes and behaviors that contribute not only to academic success but success in the workplace as well. Mr. Banks accepted his role in helping his students develop those skills. This is an interesting perspective that should especially resonate with this population of learners—many of whom are in need of more stable and substantive employment.

Finally, Ms. Caesar offered a hopeful anecdote that detailed how student commitment and perseverance can, indeed, impel positive change.

Absolutely, let me just share this one. I was out at Walgreen's picking up a prescription maybe three or four months ago. I normally go through the drive-thru, but it was so crowded I went inside of the store. As I proceeded to go back towards the pharmacy, the actual pharmacist was there. He greeted me and asked what I needed. He kept staring at me, but I didn't pay it that much attention. I gave him my name, and he asked if I remembered him. He looked familiar, but I'm horrible with names. It turns out this was a student that had been with me, I guess, over 10 years ago. . . . He gave me some background information, so now I remember him. And now he's a pharmacist. . . . They move from here and they go on to higher education. I think that was one of the greatest success stories—the pharmacist.

Ms. Caesar's recollection demonstrates what these students can achieve through, commitment, dedication, and hard work. The years of postsecondary education and training needed to become a pharmacist require a level of commitment that young man clearly displayed. Not all students are capable, or have the desire to attain, the level of success of Ms. Caesar's former student. However, he is a shining example of how commitment and dedication can lead to success for individuals many in our society have given up on. And, the skills he needed to begin his academic journey were acquired in adult basic education.

Chapter Summary

The current chapter included a detailed accounting of the general processes and specific strategies employed for data analysis. The contributions of this study's participants have provided basic knowledge and general insight into how instructors providing academic skills remediation to adult learners viewed themselves and their students. In addition, their contributions identified instructional methods designed to promote student success, as well as perceived challenges to that success. Seemingly, those challenges centered on the everyday struggles and difficulties these students faced in their lives and their perceived lack of commitment to behaviors and attitudes conducive to attaining that success. It is important to note that the participants did not blame or fault their students, but they did identify several behaviors and attitudes that were, indeed, detrimental to students' academic progress. They spoke of specific problems that these obstacles created within the classroom and also offered intervention strategies and examples that evoked a sense of hope and optimism for the futures of students in this underserved population.

Chapter 5 contains a summary of the study's purpose, research design, and methods for data collection and analysis. In addition to a discussion of the themes used for detailed analysis, the chapter contains a presentation of conclusions drawn from the research, implications for stakeholders, and recommendations for future research studies.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The previous chapter included a detailed analysis of the qualitative data collected through in-depth, semi-structured interview sessions. The voices of the 12 self-selected participants were paramount for gaining knowledge and insight into the observations, practices, and professional experiences of adult basic educators providing academic remediation to adult learners. A comprehensive analysis of the data was concomitantly supported through related concepts identified within the professional literature in addition to the process of educational criticism (Eisner, 1998).

The current and final chapter includes a summary of this phenomenological study's purpose, research design, and methods for data collection and analysis. The data were organized into four central themes for detailed analysis: (a) how instructors view themselves as professionals, (b) how instructors view their students, (c) instructional strategies employed to promote student learning, and (d) challenges to student learning. Knowledge gained from the research fueled conclusions about the experience of teaching in adult basic education, raised possible implications for policymakers and professionals within the context of adult basic education, and informed recommendations for future study.

Purpose

The purpose of this research study was to develop insight into instructors' perceptions of their roles in the development of adult learners in need of academic remediation. With so much national attention focused on K-12 reforms, many people are unfamiliar with the actors within the adult learning context. Thus, the observations, practices, and professional experiences articulated by the instructors themselves are needed to bring clarity and understanding of this milieu and perhaps to inform the profession and policymakers regarding instructional improvements that may facilitate greater success among students in adult basic education. The related literature used to help support the study's purpose focused primarily on the historical perspective and genesis of adult education, current operations of adult remedial education programs, the necessity of adult remediation, and psychological and social foundations for adult learning.

Research Design

With a clear purpose established, it became necessary to select an appropriate research design to complement the search for knowledge and understanding—which is described as basic research (Patton, 2002). The specific research question was the following: How do instructors providing remediation for adult learners describe their roles in fostering student success? The research question itself necessitated the complexity offered through qualitative research. The flexibility associated with a qualitative research design allowed for a more poignant portrayal of the complexities within the adult learning context and the social interactions of its participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Patton, 2002). In addition, that flexibility

introduced an element of subjectivity, as the researcher is an acknowledged tool in the qualitative paradigm (Eisner, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Participant perspective was the impetus for this study, so the qualitative design was best suited both to empower the participants and to give voice to their stance; their stance was important, and it mattered (Patton, 2002).

Qualitative research designs include a variety of approaches. A more concretized application of the qualitative paradigm was needed for this study. The study adopted a phenomenological approach to facilitate a deeper understanding of the meaning underlying the everyday experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). Their experiences were meaningful, and the meaning ascribed to those experiences was inherently valuable (Moustakas, 1994). A qualitative approach to research is steeped in the lived experiences of its participants; likewise, the voice and experiences of the participants are emphasized in phenomenology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Patton, 2002). Therefore, a qualitative, phenomenological research design was employed to find deeper meaning within the perceptions and accounts of the research participants.

As is the case with virtually all research efforts, limitations existed within the design of the present study. Specifically, the role and inherent subjectivity of the qualitative researcher was both pronounced and acknowledged. Therefore, the data collected for this study could differ with the experience and knowledge of a different researcher. Next, the present study was limited to the descriptions of the study participants; conclusions drawn from analyses of the data were driven by events the participants said occurred and not by activities or events that I personally observed. Finally, the present qualitative study was limited by its purposive sample and the degree

to which findings from their context could be generalized to individuals within a similar context. Generalizing qualitative research cannot occur using a traditional, positivistic paradigm (Donmoyer, 1990). However, the transferability of qualitative data can, in fact, be augmented through vivid, rich descriptions of the contextual, descriptive data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Smith, 1987).

Methods for Data Collection and Analysis

The sole source of data for this research study was garnered through the use of in-depth, one-to-one, semi-structured interviews (Kvale, 1996; Patton, 2002). The open-ended questions constructed for the interview guide were designed to stimulate purposeful conversation and elicit thick, rich descriptions from the participants (Eisner, 1998; Kvale, 1996). Research participants were employees of a large, multi-campus community college located in the southeastern region of the United States. I was an employee of the same institution; however, all research participants worked on a different campus in a different county and had no daily professional contact or ties to me. Adult basic education faculty were invited to participate in the study through campus email. All who volunteered participated in the study. In sum, 12 respondents volunteered to participate, and six follow-up sessions were conducted for a total of 18 interview sessions with research participants.

All interview sessions were digitally recorded, uploaded to a secure server, and then transcribed into text. Interview transcripts were read several times to gain an intimate familiarity with the data. That intimacy and familiarity complemented my connoisseurship, or appreciation for the research participants and their context (Eisner, 1998). Initially, that connoisseurship as an experienced adult educator helped me to

construct memos and concept maps that were used to organize data, identify key ideas, and search for relationships. Through inductive analysis, initial themes were identified for analysis and discussion; those themes were analyzed in greater detail and concretized through concepts present within the professional literature and through the process of educational criticism (Eisner, 1998; Hatch, 2002).

Summary of Themes for Analysis

The first theme presented in the analysis detailed how the faculty viewed themselves as professionals. This theme provided participants' recollections of specific experiences and general thoughts and descriptions of themselves and their professional behaviors. The analysis focused on attitudes and experiences that influenced specific practices and interactions with their students. The participants displayed an awareness and understanding of themselves and their contributions and responsibilities to their students.

The next theme for analysis detailed how the faculty viewed their students. Participant observations and perceptions were analyzed as they discussed the strengths and needs of their students. They proffered conjecture as to why their students needed remediation, as well as an optimistic view of future prospects for success.

Next, faculty described specific instructional strategies and interventions employed to facilitate student success. The discussion shifted from the need for remediation to specific teaching practices used to aid student learning. Their instructional styles and designs varied, but they sought to accommodate for student need and highlighted student strengths.

The final theme for analysis focused on what the participants identified as challenges to student learning. Teaching and learning are not mutually exclusive events; therefore, challenges to student learning also presented challenges for classroom instruction. Participants shared anecdotes and recollections that communicated the trials many of their students had to navigate in order to find success not only within the classroom, but also in their professional lives. Faculty, once again, worked with students to help them succeed academically in spite of these challenges.

Conclusions

Analyses of the data led to several conclusions. First, participants expressed confidence in their abilities to teach students who had experienced learning challenges in their pasts. They demonstrated high levels of teacher efficacy; they communicated a sincere belief in their abilities to teach, as well as a sincere belief in their students' abilities to learn from them. They saw value in caring for their students—not insipid, disingenuous oral declarations—but tangible gestures and specific comments that communicated their commitment to building relationships with their students. Furthermore, faculty saw themselves as humanistic managers; they cared for and looked to holistically develop their students as people. They focused on maintaining student motivation and learner engagement. Effective classroom management equates to longer periods of time-on-task and academic engagement.

Next, faculty shared observations that depicted students as ashamed of, or embarrassed by, their academic deficiencies. Their students lacked self-confidence for a variety of reasons—most notably for their past academic failures. Their previous experiences then negatively influenced their sense of academic self-efficacy. Faculty

found it important to identify those students and looked to build belief and confidence within them. Participants found value in building upon the life experiences and survival skills of their students. This approach diverted the focus away from the source of the students' embarrassment and empowered them to have more control over their own learning—thus promoting a sense of autonomy. Essentially, the participants believed in the capabilities of their students, but they recognized the importance of encouraging their students to believe in their own capabilities as well.

Next, faculty acknowledged a need to keep students engaged and actively involved in classroom activities. Active instructional approaches promote learner engagement. Group investigation and the use of learning communities promote both social interaction and active engagement in learning. Furthermore, adult learners are more likely to persist and participate in class activities when they see a connection between their experiences and their learning (Knowles, 1984). Faculty prioritized making learning activities relevant to the experiences of their students and utilized such activities accordingly.

Finally, challenges and situations identified by participants as deleterious to student learning impacted the work of the instructors as well. Irregular attendance patterns and excessive tardiness diminished opportunities for student participation in learning activities and instruction. These student issues can create potential problems for instructors with classroom management and instructional continuity. Instructors must be cognizant of mitigating factors facing students within this context that may preclude consistent class attendance and participation such as transportation, child care, or legal constraints. These are not to be interpreted or misconstrued as excuses for behavior, but

instructors must understand that many of their students are not adequately equipped to navigate these challenges and persist with their education. Student behaviors are driven by attitudes and prior experience. Students must be held accountable for their actions; however, instructors within this context implicitly and sometimes explicitly serve as resources to guide positive behaviors conducive to success within the classroom setting and with potential employers. Many students simply do not know any better, and their instructors become central figures in their support systems for meeting and overcoming challenges in an appropriate manner. In sum, instructors within this context tend to focus more on the abilities and what their students may be able to do with instructor assistance as opposed to their deficiencies, mistakes, or things they seemingly cannot do.

Implications for Professional Practice and Policymaking

Students who leave high school prior to graduation do so for a variety of reasons. Their prior experiences and needs demand the informed, concentrated, and concerted efforts of committed educational professionals in shaping positive educational experiences. If these students choose to continue their education within the adult education context, classroom instructors and program administrators who set policy must work together to provide high-quality educational services to this underserved population of learners. Conclusions drawn from the present research study hold implications for policymakers and professionals within the field for how they may develop and implement programs more likely to facilitate student success.

1. *The mentality and expectations of adult educators are different from those of K-12 teachers.* Adult learners are not children and should not be treated or taught as such (Knowles, 1984). They are parents, grandparents, providers, spouses, and a host of other

titles; they bring their life experiences as well as their life challenges to the classroom. Their instructors must realize that instructional design and materials must reflect that point. Students in both contexts may need to develop similar academic skills, but adult learners are less likely to participate and engage in activities they do not view as relevant to their experiences (Knowles, 1984).

2. *Program administrators must commit to organizing in-service and professional development programs to assist faculty with embracing and implementing more interactive and relevant modes of instruction.* For example, professional development sessions designed to expose faculty to culturally responsive teaching methods, group investigation and discovery models, or classroom learning communities can benefit instructors by providing them with research-based and innovative techniques to implement in their classes; ultimately, the students are the true beneficiaries of more relevant and engaging instruction designed to augment their prospects for success. Instructors must work to create learner-centered classroom environments and utilize these in-service experiences to develop instructional approaches that reinforce connections between classroom content and the experiences of the adult learner. This is in stark contrast to traditional, currently practiced, teacher-driven modes of instruction (Soney, 2003).

3. *Instructors and program administrators must realize that the needs of the adult learner extend beyond academics.* Most adult learners seek the requisite academic skills for entry into postsecondary education or into the workplace. However, many lack the social skills and attitudes needed to succeed in either arena. An element of classroom instruction has to incorporate skills related to student success and employability. Instead

of excoriating their students for not possessing these skills, instructors must promote and encourage their students to develop and exhibit skills like punctuality, note-taking, and preparedness. And, because many of these students are looking to gain entry into or advancement in the workplace, many of these skills relate directly to their experiences. Job placement services may also be considered by program administrators to increase student motivation. In fact, curriculum and instruction within adult education programs should explicitly reflect the demands and skills needed for successful transition into the workplace (Chaplin & Hannaway, 1996; Soney, 2003). Funding must be appropriated by policymakers for programs and ancillary support materials that promote student success and employability skills. The instructors must recognize their value and effectively incorporate these materials into instructional practice.

4. *Program administrators should consider implementing or extending the use of mentors and volunteer tutors to support their students.* As evidenced through the analysis, faculty found value in developing genuine, caring relationships with their students. These relationships are critical to both learner engagement and persistence. However, it would be a fallacy to conclude this practice as being feasible for instructors to accomplish alone with all of their students. Faculty may not have sufficient time to forge those relationships or to provide individual attention for all of their students. Mentors and tutors, particularly former adult education students who have transitioned into college or the workforce, would be ideal models of success for current students. The relationships these mentors and tutors build with students may prove to be just as fruitful as the relationships built with faculty.

5. *Program administrators may seek the employ or expanded use of*

professional, licensed counselors to relieve some of the pressure from the classroom instructors. In addition to providing competent, comprehensive academic instruction, instructors often become the central figures in student support systems. Students look to them for assistance in navigating the complexities of their situations; they are empathic figures who, in addition to their instructional responsibilities, offer counsel and support for a myriad of student problems such as legal issues, dysfunctional relationships, and financial hardships. The instructors are willing, but, in many cases, they are not equipped to offer anything more than a sympathetic ear or emotional support. Personal issues and challenges often preclude adult learner participation in school. Making counseling services available would help students to address their personal issues more appropriately; subsequently, the employ of these services would allow the classroom instructors more of an opportunity to help students with their academic issues. Furthermore, providing counseling services for the students demonstrates a more holistic view of student development that addresses far more than simply the academic needs of the students. Institutional leaders, who receive state and federal funding for the operation of these programs, have a responsibility to provide the ancillary services needed for the holistic development of the students they serve.

Recommendations for Further Research

The present study foreshadows possibilities for potential research efforts into the adult learning milieu. Ultimately, any actions taken to improve program proficiency or instructional effectiveness are done so as to foster and promote student development. Further research is needed to bring awareness and understanding to adult learning and also to inform decisions regarding curriculum and instruction in adult learning programs;

qualitative research designs may be employed to find perspective from the other principal actors within adult learning programs—the students and the program administrators.

Perceptions of students' experiences while enrolled in an adult basic education program would lend knowledge and insight into the complex learning processes of adult learners. Value exists within their experiences and how these students perceive interactions with their instructors, staff members, and other students. They can articulate and illustrate their own stories and provide feedback for instructors and program administrators as to what they see as beneficial to or detracting from their school experience. The present research study focused specifically on adult basic education; however, to gain knowledge about other segments within adult education, participants for further research efforts may be selected from GED, adult high school, or ESOL classes.

Likewise, it would prove beneficial to implement a qualitative research study designed to explore program administrators' perceptions of their mission and their work within the adult learning context. Again, value can be obtained from both their professional practices and experiences. Satiating the needs of faculty, staff, students, and the community at large, while overseeing the daily operations of such a vital program, is complex and challenging work. Skill and efficiency are essential, and a host of stakeholders could potentially benefit from research into the professional purpose and experience of these administrators.

The present research study into adult basic educator perceptions and experiences has the potential to impel further research into other arenas within adult education. Aside from the instructors, the two other principal actors within the context are the students and the program administrators who set and implement policy. Research into their

experiences may develop key insight into program efficiency and inform decisions that ultimately promote and augment student development.

Chapter Summary

This chapter included a summary of the current study's purpose, research design, and subsequent methods utilized for the collection of data and its analyses. In addition, it contained a summary of the four themes identified for analysis and discussion: (a) how instructors view themselves as professionals; (b) how instructors view their students; (c) strategies employed to promote student learning; and (d) challenges to student learning. The study examined adult basic education instructors' descriptions and perceptions of their professional behaviors, practices, and student interactions. Their participation in the study fostered a greater understanding of their mission and provided context for their work.

An understanding of instructors' work with adult learners signaled implications for other professionals within the field as well as for policymakers to insure improvements in instructional effectiveness and overall program efficiency. Further research into the field is needed both to promote awareness and to continue innovative instructional support services for an underserved population of learners. Helping these non-traditional students become successful, productive members of their communities is both economically and morally beneficial for society; understanding the mission and work of their instructors provides unique perspective and insight into the complexities, challenges, and triumphs of adult learning.

Appendix A
Institutional Review Board Approval



Office of Research and Sponsored Programs

1 UNF Drive

Jacksonville, FL 32224-2665

904-620-2455 FAX 904-620-2457

Equal Opportunity/Equal Access/Affirmative Action Institution

MEMORANDUM

DATE: August 26, 2009

TO: Mr. Lance Baxter

VIA: Dr. Elinor Scheirer
Dept. LCIT

FROM: Dr. Katherine Kasten, Chairperson
UNF Institutional Review Board

RE: Review by the UNF Institutional Review Board IRB#09-028: "A View from Within: Instructors' Perspective of their Roles with Adult Learners in Need of Remediation"

This is to advise you that your project, "A View from Within: Instructors' Perspective of their Roles with Adult Learners in Need of Remediation," was reviewed on behalf of the UNF Institutional Review Board and has been declared "exempt from further IRB review" with the following notation:

- Any change(s) in regard to data storage and data access will require an amendment to this protocol prior to implementing any changes

This approval applies to your project in the form and content as submitted to the IRB for review. Any variations or modifications to the approved protocol and/or informed consent forms as they relate to dealing with human subjects must be cleared with the IRB prior to implementing such changes. Any unanticipated problems involving risk and any occurrence of serious harm to subjects and others shall be reported promptly to the IRB.

As you may know, your **CITI Course Completion Report** is valid for 3 years. Your completion report is valid through 06/11/10. If your completion report expires soon please take CITI's refresher course. Once you complete all of the CITI modules our office will be notified.

Should you have any questions regarding your project or any other IRB issues, please contact Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 904.620.2455.

Thank you,

Dawn P. O'Connor

Research Integrity Coordinator

Appendix B

Letter of Invitation

Dear (Participant Name):

My name is Lance Baxter and I am an assistant professor at Daytona State College. In addition, I am a doctoral student with the University of North Florida.

I am in the process of putting together an interview study highlighting instructor experiences and perceptions related to their roles in educating adult learners needing academic remediation. Your participation and input are invaluable to the success of the study. I am aware that your time is limited, so all interview times and locations would be scheduled to meet with your convenience.

I wish to extend a most sincere invitation to you for your participation in this effort. Your professional knowledge is valued, and I feel that your voice is integral for a greater understanding of the fine work you do and the students whom you serve. Thank you for your time and consideration. If you are interested in participating or you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me via email _____, my office _____, or my cell phone _____.

Sincerely,

Lance Baxter

Appendix C

Informed Consent Document

Title: A View from Within: Instructors' Perspectives of Their Roles with Adult Learners in Need of Remediation

Investigator(s): Lance J. Baxter

Affiliations: University of North Florida

Contact Information:

Approved By Institutional Review Board:

This is an important form. Please read carefully. It tells you what you need to know about this research study. If you agree to take part in this study, you need to sign this form. Your signature means that you have been told about the study and what the risks are. Your signature on this form also means that you want to take part in this study.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Refusal to participate in this research will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you otherwise are entitled.

You may discontinue participation in this research study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits you are otherwise entitled to.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this study is to seek knowledge and gain understanding of adult educator perspectives in fostering academic success for struggling adult learners on the basic, secondary, and postsecondary levels. The specific focus of the study centers on how the instructors of adult learners in need of remediation perceive their work within the context of a two-year, multi-campus postsecondary institution. Their perspectives will shed light on what is being done by the instructors to facilitate progress and success with a challenging and underserved population of learners.

What will happen in this study?

Research data will be collected through your participation in at least 1 semi-structured interview session. That data will then be transcribed, analyzed, and interpreted for review.

How long will I be in the study?

You will be needed for at least one 60-90 minute interview. If you agree, I may wish to follow up with you later for another interview. All interview sessions should be completed by December 12, 2009.

Are there reasons I might leave the study early?

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may decide to stop at any time. You should tell the director of the study that you wish to stop. In addition, the director of this study may stop you from taking part if it is in your best interest.

What are the risks of the study?

There is no foreseeable risk involved with your participation in this research effort.

Are there benefits to taking part in this study?

Your participation in this study will contribute to the depth of available professional knowledge related to the adult learning context. Results of this study may help to further the understanding of the relationship between teaching and learning in the adult context. In addition, study results may influence policymakers and other instructors who provide academic remediation services for these students. Ultimately, the adult learners stand to benefit most from an increased awareness of positive teaching strategies conducive to facilitating their learning.

Are there any monetary or other compensation or inducements for my taking part in this subject?

No monetary inducements will be provided as remuneration for your participation in this study.

Are there any financial costs to me to take part in this study?

There are no foreseeable financial costs associated with your participation in this study.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You do not have to take part in this study; but if you do, you may stop at any time. You will be told of important new findings or any changes in the study or procedures that may affect you. You do not give up any of your rights by taking part in this study.

What about confidentiality?

Data from this study may be published or used in publications. However, your name and other identifying information will not be known to anyone but me. .

Will there be audio taping or video taping? If so, will I get to view them before they are used? Who will review tapes besides the researchers? Who will have access to the tapes? When will they be destroyed? *(Note – If tapes are to be used outside of the research project, a separate release form should be obtained.)*

Interview sessions will be conducted by December 12, 2009. Interview sessions will be digitally recorded and downloaded to, accessed from, and protected by the University of North Florida Secure Shell (SSH) server. This server includes a File Transfer Protocol (FTP) accessible to the researcher and the researcher's dissertation chair. Any transfer of data from the researcher's personal computer and the server will be secure.

Who can answer my questions?

You may talk to Lance Baxter . . . at any time about questions and concerns you may have about this study. You may also contact Dr. Elinor Scheirer at the University of North Florida

You may obtain further information about UNF policies, the conduct of this study, the rights of research subjects or if you suffer injury related to your participation in this research project from the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Christopher Leone,

I have had an opportunity to have my questions answered. I have been given a copy of this form. I agree to take part in this study. I am over 18 years of age.

I am at least 18 years old. _____ (initials)

I have had the study that I am agreeing to participate in explained to me to my satisfaction.

_____ (initials)

I have had the opportunity to ask any questions that I may have had regarding this study.

_____ (initials)

I agree to participate in (*study name*) _____ being conducted by
(PI) _____ and the University of North Florida.

Date

Printed Name of Participant

Signed Name of Participant

Date

Printed Name of Individual Obtaining Consent

Date

Signed Name of Individual Obtaining Consent

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

1. What are the backgrounds and characteristics typical of the students you encounter in the courses you teach?
2. What challenges have your students faced in their past educational experiences?
3. What varying skill levels and abilities do students bring to your classes?
4. How have you tried to meet the differing needs of your students?
5. What makes it difficult for your students to succeed?
6. How would you describe a typical day in working with your students?
7. What specific strategies or techniques have you implemented to make the classroom experience conducive to learning for your students?
8. How would you describe yourself as an instructor?
9. What are your thoughts on effective teaching and instruction?
10. What impedes your efficacy as an instructor?
11. How have you already changed since the inception of your teaching career?
12. What resources do you see as essential for the continued development of your students?
13. What else would you like to share which we have not previously discussed that you feel is germane to the discussion?

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LANCE J. BAXTER

Faculty Vita

EDUCATIONAL INNOVATOR/ INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER

Ambitious, energetic, and experienced professional educator seeking to enhance the milieu of public education through instruction, instructional leadership, and professional development. , a dedicated professional concerned with education and access for all.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

2001-2002 Pasco County School Board Land O' Lakes, FL
Intermediate (3-5) Teacher

- Assessment and evaluation of student progress
- Fostered academic and social development
- Maintained and promoted a safe environment conducive to learning
- Facilitated and participated in extracurricular professional development activities

2002-present Daytona State College Daytona Beach, FL
Associate Professor

- Assessment and evaluation of student progress
- Provided comprehensive instruction and mentoring for students on the adult basic, secondary, and postsecondary levels
- Facilitated and participated in extracurricular professional development activities
- Served on a cadre of department and campus wide action committees

EDUCATION

1997-1999 Daytona Beach Community College Daytona Beach, FL
Associate of Arts

- Social and Human Services

1999-2001 University of Central Florida Orlando, FL
Bachelor of Science

- Elementary Education (1-6)

2002-2003 University of North Florida Jacksonville, FL
Master of Education

- Reading Education (K-12)

2004-2012 University of North Florida Jacksonville, FL
Doctor of Education

- Educational Leadership (Adult Education and Higher Learning)